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Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life. By Kingsley M. Bray. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. 528 pages. \$34.95 paper.

Dozens of popular and scholarly works have characterized Crazy Horse. He has been portrayed as “the strange man of the Oglalas,” “a lover of war,” “heroic,” “an Indian patriot,” and “a trouble maker.” Kingsley Bray’s new biography, crafted from twenty years of research in northern plains history, makes a great contribution to this emerging body of literature in terms of the scope and sophistication of his work. This is the most comprehensive coverage to date.

The Crazy Horse of this biography is no one-dimensional figure. Bray carefully integrates a wide array of primary and secondary sources to present an exceptional man who, although shaped by his times, influenced his Lakota people. The author argues that Crazy Horse was “no brash, unthinking fighting man,” but “modest, reflective, reserved to the point of introversion” (xv). He was a complex individual: spiritually grounded, capable of violent actions, generous to those in need, scarred by numerous personal tragedies, talented in military tactics, and defiant toward American expansion.

Bray organizes his thirty-chapter book into six sections. Part I, “Curly Hair,” as Crazy Horse was known as a boy, traces his life from his 1840 birth through his early adolescence. The author examines his early upbringing, including how the suicide of his mother set him apart from others and how participation in cultural rituals and early acts of bravery helped connect him to his larger community. In Part II, “Thunder Dreamer,” Bray shows how Crazy Horse’s vision quest, *heyoka* ceremony, and other spiritual exercises strengthened his foundation for leadership later in life. Conscious of conflicts with Americans that took the lives of his brother and other relatives, he increasingly earns respect for his generosity and bravery. Part III, “Shirt Wearer,” places Crazy Horse into the more common narrative of nineteenth-century military and political history of a Lakota resistance to American encroachment on their Powder River hunting grounds (north of the Black Hills). His tactical leadership in Lakota military victories, particularly during Red Cloud’s War (1866–68), earned him the status of one of four Lakota Shirt Wearers.

With a strong context of Crazy Horse’s earlier life established, Bray emphasizes his later years (at least partly due to the greater availability of sources) as a Lakota leader in Parts IV through VI. In “War Chief,” Bray moves beyond myth making to humanize Crazy Horse by showing his personal struggles and devotion to his people. Readers learn about his elopement with Black Buffalo Woman, the facial injury he experienced at the hands of her disgruntled husband, loss of his status as a Shirt Wearer, his eventual marriage to Black Shawl, and the birth and early death of a daughter. Despite these challenges, Bray shows that his spiritual formation empowered him (as it would throughout his life) to devote the remainder of his life to defending his people’s homeland. Part V, “Days of Whirlwind,” focuses on events building up to and through the famous 1876 Battle of the Little Big Horn. Crazy Horse and his men come across as cool and tactically wise in contrast to the more

panic-stricken Americans during this historic battle. "I Cherish the Land" concludes the work by setting Crazy Horse apart from other Lakota leaders in his efforts to unite the northern Lakotas and maintain independence from agency life. With Sitting Bull (Hunkpapa) taking his people to Canada and Red Cloud (Oglala), Spotted Tail (Brulé), and others taking more accommodating dispositions to Americans, Crazy Horse seems to stand alone in defending his people's right to their homeland in the Powder River country.

The work stands out in its serious effort to do more than chronicle the events in which Crazy Horse was present. Bray attempts to explain the man, which is not an easy process for an historical figure with limited documentation available about him. In order to do so, Bray mined transcripts of early-twentieth-century interviews given by Crazy Horse's contemporaries, examined a wide range of government documents pertaining to US-Lakota relations, synthesized a large collection of secondary sources, and spent more than ten years interviewing relatives of Crazy Horse prior to the publication of the work. The remarkable results of such rigorous research can be found in the multiple influences—cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, personal experiences, community desires, and the sociopolitical dynamics—that Bray is able to suggest as motivating Crazy Horse's actions.

Crazy Horse was no outspoken man, but a leader who considered numerous factors. His eventual decision to take his people to Red Cloud's agency (near present-day Fort Robinson, Nebraska) is a good example. Bray shows that his conclusion to relocate stemmed from harsh 1877 winter conditions, lack of game, concern for his wife's health, the morale of his people, and diplomatic initiatives by agency relatives. Crazy Horse's flexible disposition and ability to alter strategies comes across throughout the work. Also, Crazy Horse's decision to leave the Powder River country was no sign of surrender. Rather, Bray suggests, the Oglala leader chose to shift from military resistance to political negotiations as a new method toward his same goal: "to keep my country."

More than simply a biography, the work also explores varied dimensions of Lakota society on the nineteenth-century northern plains. It is certainly a world in which words such as *American Indian* or *Sioux* are not helpful in promoting understanding. It was a complicated setting of intertribal marriages; separation and realignment of multitribal bands; emerging alliances and conflicts with other tribes; and political conflicts between leaders. Intertribal bands could be strengthened when Crazy Horse was born to Rattle Blanket Woman (Miniconjou) and Crazy Horse (an Oglala, who took the name "Worm" after naming his son "Crazy Horse"). When Crazy Horse (Hunkpatila Oglala) married Black Shawl (Oyuhpe Oglala) they reinforced band connections. When he took a second wife, Nellie Larabee (mixed-blood Cheyenne) later in his life, they strengthened intertribal bonds. Relationships outside of the Sioux confederation were not uniform. Lakotas formed alliances with Cheyennes and Arapahos but regularly embarked on expeditions against the Crows and Shoshones. Conflicts and differences of opinion were also a reality within Lakota society—and *tiospayes* (extended families) regularly decided to leave their group leader to join another camp of relatives. Bray highlights

the emerging distinctions, tensions, and open conflicts as the narrative shifts from a fairly united Lakota people opposed to American construction of the Bozeman Trail in the mid-1860s to a more divided society following the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The most extreme example of conflicts comes in Bray's account of how fear and suspicion led Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, and American Horse to spread rumors of an alleged Crazy Horse plot to kill General George Crook. This ultimately led to the 1877 arrest and murder of Crazy Horse at Fort Robinson, Nebraska.

Within the context of Crazy Horse's life, readers also learn about the evolution of Lakota-American relations. Following an earlier era of more cooperative intercultural relations at its height during the 1830s, Crazy Horse's generation came of age in a time that experienced disease cutting into communities, buffalo trade fairs declining, and American interest in western lands growing into open conflicts. Bray also reveals the connections between this Lakota story and components of US history, including political dynamics in Washington, DC, emerging market capitalism, the completion of the transcontinental railroad, and federal Indian policies toward other tribes like the Nez Perce. Bray raises questions about an inconsistent federal Indian policy that encouraged Lakotas to put down their weapons and then requested Crazy Horse to lead a scouting group against the Nez Perce. Why should we "put blood on our faces again," Crazy Horse responded to the mixed messages that promoted peace and war at the same time. American leaders are not one-dimensional figures in this study, and some lower-level military leaders apparently tried to assist Lakotas and ease their transition. Ultimately, however, federal officials in Washington promoted policies of land cessions that took precedence over individual agreements made between tribal leaders and federal agents stationed in the West.

Like most books, the strength of Bray's work can be a weakness. It is very well written, but at nearly four hundred pages it is not a slight book. Its comprehensive coverage will be applauded by advanced readers and specialists but will be difficult to fit into an undergraduate American Indian history survey where it could make great contributions. Still, graduate students and scholars in American Indian history, Native biography, and the nineteenth-century northern plains will welcome the seventy-six pages of endnotes, a seventeen-page bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and a fifteen-page index. All will appreciate the seventeen illustrations and seven maps that help place a story of geographic and cultural transitions.

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