UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877. Compiled, edited, and annotatedby JeromeA. Greene.

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4p99464i

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 19(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Berthrong, Donald J.

Publication Date

1995-06-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

that will use it requires the symbology found on conventional maps (e.g., dots representing settlements, lines representing boundaries) in order to orient themselves. However, few nonnatives today interact as completely with their environment as natives once did in historical times. Recognizing this, Galois acknowledges the difficulties inherent in portraying concepts such as *villages* and *resource procurement sites* on maps—terms that may not have equivalent meanings in different cultures. Toward a goal of compromise, he seems to have worked closely with the Kwakwaka'wakw to depict such items accurately.

Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775–1920 is, first and foremost, a significant addition to the documentary and primary source literature of the native peoples of British Columbia. Overall, I found Galois's book to be informative and well crafted. Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775–1920, the first volume in UBC's Press's Northwest Native Studies series, will serve as an important example to other scholars hoping to organize and publish materials relating to historical native occupancy of particular landscapes. It merits a place on the reference shelf of anyone doing in-depth research in Native American ethnogeography. Many such projects could profit by using this book as a model.

Randy J. Bertolas
State University of New York at Buffalo

Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877. Compiled, edited, and annotated by Jerome A. Greene. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. 240 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

In 1876–77, Lakota and Cheyenne warriors fought United States troops for the right to live in the Powder River country. The Great Sioux War, as editor Jerome A. Greene calls the conflict, was the last war fought over this region of the northern Plains. Earlier, Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Shoshoni, Blackfoot, and other tribes had fought each other individually or in alliances to control the food supply provided by the vast northern buffalo herd that ranged from the Platte River northward into Canada. The area drained by the Powder, Tongue, and Bighorn rivers, a favorite camping area and hunting ground for Lakota and northern divisions of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, was still

relatively isolated in early 1876, because wagon roads did not penetrate the heart of the Powder River country; the advance of the Northern Pacific Railroad, although surveyed as far west as the Musselshell River, was delayed by the depression following the Panic of 1873.

A voluminous literature exists about the Great Sioux War. Partially, the romanticization of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer's defeat on the Little Bighorn River on 25 June 1876 has resulted in a flood of syntheses, campaign histories, accounts of individual engagements, biographies, and memoirs of U.S. army commanders—written by scholars, professional writers, pulp authors, and participants in this war. One of the better volumes, published four decades ago, contains a ten-page bibliography listing the more reliable secondary sources. Today a similar bibliography, listing only credible volumes, would probably be double that size.

Lakota and Cheyenne contains forty-one accounts (not counting one composite account), describing eleven engagements and the death of Crazy Horse. Chronologically, begins with the Powder River fight on 17 March 1876 and ends with the death of Crazy Horse on 7 September 1877 at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. Thirty participants or eyewitnesses (only three of them women)—sixteen Lakota and fourteen Chevenne—provided the forty-one accounts; two individuals, Lazy (Joseph) White Bull, Lakota, and Little Hawk, Cheyenne, contributed descriptions of three different engagements. Very nearly two-thirds of the accounts are taken from archival or manuscript collections; others are found in little-known magazines, while several are from generally used books. The George Bird Grinnell Collection, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, is the source for fifteen Chevenne accounts, while the Sioux accounts are scattered in the National Archives. Nebraska State Historical Society, University of Oklahoma Library, Brigham Young University Library, and several other archival collections.

Because either eyewitnesses or participants provide these accounts, they are very credible. Laudably, the editor avoids the murky authenticity of oral history or hearsay. The accounts provide the perspectives of the warriors who fought in the engagements of the Great Sioux War, focusing on actions or observations and not on the broader context of why the Lakota and Cheyenne defied an order for all to remain on their reservations. In the warrior tradition, coup-taking had to be recounted pre-

cisely or the individual would be discredited by fellow warriors. To be accurate, a warrior could describe only what he had done or seen.

The editor warns that care should be exercised in the use of these accounts. An individual's perception of the event might be flawed, or language problems, including imprecise translation, could lead to errors in the accounts. Some accounts, such as those in the Grinnell Collection, were recorded decades after the event, and sometimes Grinnell was not present when the interpreter or intermediary originally wrote down the description. Recorders of the accounts sometimes changed the sequence of events and changed the text from first to third person. Nevertheless, these accounts and archaeological evidence are what we have to reconstruct the final annihilation of Custer's Seventh Cavalry.

Not surprisingly, about one-quarter of the narratives describe the Battle of the Little Bighorn and confirm what many authorities have contended: that the annihilation of Custer's battalion proceeded quickly. Red Horse, a Minneconjou chief, states that Custer's men scattered, and some tried to surrender. "The Sioux," Red Horse remembered, "did not take a single soldier prisoner, but killed all of them; none were left alive for even a few minutes" (p. 35). The statements of Young Two Moon, Cheyenne, confirm Red Horse's assertion that Custer's troops were demoralized and divided in small groups; he recalled, "[H]ad all stood together the Indians could have done nothing with them" (p. 70). The warriors pinned down the troops led by Major Marcus A. Reno and Captain Frederick W. Benteen so that they could not support Custer's ill-fated charge.

Casualties were heavy. Two hundred fifteen officers and men were killed with Custer, as were forty-seven men of Reno's command. The accounts do not provide us with accurate figures of Indian casualties. Estimates cited elsewhere vary from thirty to three hundred Indians killed. Red Horse states that 136 warriors were killed (p. 40). She Walks with Her Shawl, Lakota, says more than sixty (p. 46) died. Soldier Wolf, Cheyenne, states that six of his companions and "more" Sioux were killed (p. 52), while Little Hawk estimates that twenty-three (presumably Northern Cheyenne) died in the fighting (p. 64).

Engagements subsequent to the Battle of the Little Bighorn constitute the remainder of the volume. Most of the actions were skirmishes, and a couple are called battles by the editor, but none compare to the fighting at the Little Bighorn. The Battle of Slim

Buttes on 9 September 1876 resulted in three troopers and seven (p. 86) or ten (p. 90) Lakota killed. Two engagements caused the Lakota and Cheyenne to return to their reservations. On 25 November 1876, cavalry led by Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie found Dull Knife's village in the Bighorn Mountains, destroyed it, and killed forty Cheyenne, while suffering six troopers killed. In the Wolf Mountains, Colonel Nelson A. Miles and infantry fought Crazy Horse's Oglala and refugees from the Bighorn village for five hours, after which Lakota and Cheyenne began to surrender at Dakota Territory agencies.

Writers have long debated the specific cause of Crazy Horse's death. The last two narratives describe the scuffle that occurred on 7 September 1877 at Fort Robinson, when an attempt was made to imprison the thirty-five-year-old Oglala warrior-chief. Some writers maintain that Crazy Horse died from a wound made by his own knife, others by a knife wielded by another Oglala; the accounts in this book, however, agree with those that claim that Crazy Horse died from a bayonet wound. Whether he died from a deliberate or an unintentional bayonet wound cannot be decided from these descriptions. Standing Soldier maintained, "The soldier stabbed him purposely. . . ." (p. 150), while American Horse recalled that "the soldier did not stab Crazy Horse intentionally" (p. 152).

The editor provides necessary information to place the accounts in their proper context. A succinct introduction explains why the followers of Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Dull Knife [Morning Star] gathered at the Little Bighorn. Concise headnotes identify the authors of the accounts and the location of each account in an archival collection or a publication. The photographs of the narrators are not those that have been overused in other books. By wisely limiting the explanatory notes to seventeen, the editor allows the Indian view of the fighting to come through without the distracting clutter of ancillary information. One could wish that the accounts had clarified unsettled issues such as the number of Indians killed at the Little Bighorn or the cause of Crazy Horse's death, but they do not. The editor does, however, succeed in providing us with the first comprehensive volume containing Indian perceptions of the skirmishes and battles in the Powder River country.

Donald J. Berthrong Purdue University