

Chapter One

THE LAKOTA SIOUX

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According to Lakota mythology, long before humans were born, different powers and creatures struggled to exercise control or influence over the cosmos. As a result they created the Sun, the Moon, and Mother Earth. Once the four winds, each with its own task, were born, the directions and most important powers of the world were set. Eventually the godlike creatures grew tired of each other and sent Iktomi (trickster) to find people. At that time people lived underground together with the buffalo in a state of chaos. That is why the people were also called *Pte oyate*, the Buffalo People. According to some versions of the story, the people and the buffalo emerged from beneath the earth together.

After emerging from the earth, the people and the buffalo did not get along. The buffalo were dreadful creatures, and people were afraid of them. The people had no food, and the buffalo did not agree to be eaten. According to Lakota myths, a strange contest took place in those early times: Animals raced around the sacred Black Hills (*Hesapa*) to decide who was the most important. The bison seemed to be in clear lead. Just as the end of the race was near, it turned out that a small bird had sat on the bison's shoulders and flew across the finish line. Because the bird, like the human being, is one of the two-legged creatures (*hununpa*) of the earth, it meant that human beings also got credit for the victory. As a result, humans received the right to use animals as sustenance. Hence, the human beings were *wakan akan-tula*, "things on top" (Walker 1991, 68–74).

Thus, in the beginning, there was disharmony between humans, animals, and superhuman elements. Then the mythical White Buffalo Woman

(*Wohpe/Ptesawin*) came to resolve the conflict. The story is central to the Lakota belief system and encompasses abundant symbolism. There are multiple versions of the story, but the main idea remains: When the woman turns into a buffalo, she creates a connection between the buffalo and the human, and the human and the *Wakan Tanka*. The White Buffalo Woman is a link between *Wakan Tanka* and humans. In the myth, the woman calls the Lakotas her relatives, saying that she was their sister and at the same time was one with them. When the woman brought the Lakotas the sacred pipe, she gave them the foundation of their religious ceremonies. The pipe symbolizes the universe, and the fire in the bowl is the symbolic center of the universe, serving as a direct link, prayer, to *Wakan Tanka*. In addition to the pipe, the buffalo, or symbolism related to it, is an integral part of religious rituals and rites. In her great generosity, the woman gave the Lakotas seven sacred ceremonies that were to ensure that the buffalo would fill the earth and the Lakota nation would thrive.

This is how the Lakotas placed human beings and animals as part of the Creation. In the Lakota view, the world was an entity, and human beings were part of it. They did not make a distinction between the supernatural and the natural world. Although some things were beyond human understanding, they were a natural part of the world; they were *wakan*. *Wakan* can be understood as a mystic power that consists of everything that cannot be comprehended. Everything in the world originated from this power that was everywhere. Animals, rivers, lakes, plants, even people, were *wakan*, or they had a *wakan* power. Together, the world's *wakan* powers formed *Wakan Tanka*, the mystic power of the universe, which can also be described with the words sacred or sacredness. Western conception might characterize *Wakan Tanka* as a godlike being, but the Lakotas do not view *Wakan Tanka* as a single being but as a power that encompasses everything living and inanimate, visible and invisible.

The most comprehensive sources for understanding Lakota beliefs, myths, and stories are materials collected by James Walker in the early twentieth century and published in *Lakota Myth* (1983) and *Lakota Belief and Ritual* (1991). Another important source is *Dakota Texts* (2006) by Ella Deloria. The latest publications on Lakota myths are *Lakota Legends and Myths: Native American Oral Traditions Recorded by Marie L. McLaughlin and Zitkala-Sa* (2009) and *The Sons of the Wind: The Sacred Stories of the Lakota* (Dooling 2000). Excellent studies on Lakota religious thought are *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation* (DeMallie & Parks 1987), *Oglala Religion* (Powers 1977), and a summary by Raymond J. DeMallie (2001b). Black Elk, a famed Oglala medicine man, provides us with the most comprehensive insider view on Lakota religion in John G. Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1961) and *The Sixth Grandfather* (DeMallie 1985). Joseph Epes Brown's *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (1989) gives additional information on Lakota religious ceremonies.

Lakota mythology explains Lakota origins and their relationship with the universe. Understanding Lakota views is instrumental in seeking an interpretation of Lakota behavior. For example, in 1890 a religion known as the Ghost Dance promised the return of the buffalo by dancing a certain dance. By then the buffalo was almost hunted to extinction by the whites. For the Lakotas the buffalo had symbolically returned to the earth from where they had once originated. When the new religion, which the Lakotas called *wanagi wachipi kin*, the Spirit Dance, told that the buffalo would again emerge from the earth, this was natural for the Lakotas. And so was meeting with the spirits of the departed during the dance ceremonies. For the whites both ideas were ridiculous and even dangerous. The new religious ceremonies had to be stopped, which eventually led to the Wounded Knee massacre in December 1890 (see DeMallie 1993; Andersson 2008).

The Lakotas

Until the eighteenth century, the Lakotas and other Siouan groups lived in present-day Minnesota and Wisconsin. In the mid-eighteenth century, the first groups of Sioux crossed the Missouri River and settled permanently on the western plains. Gradually, more Sioux moved to the plains, and by the early nineteenth century they had become a typical hunting tribe of the plains.

The first white accounts of Sioux Indians are from the 1640s, when fur trappers and explorers Jean Nicollet and Paul LeJeune met some Sioux on the upper Missouri. Most early explorers described the Sioux as proud, honest, and noble-looking people, who took great honor in war. Early missionaries, mostly Jesuits, compared the Sioux with the Iroquois, who were the strongest and most warlike of the eastern Indians. Many travelers described the Sioux with respect mixed with fear, while they used words that are rarely seen in their depictions of other Indians. The early white reports are fragmented and mostly deal with the Eastern Sioux. By the late eighteenth century more trappers, traders, explorers, and artists ventured beyond the Missouri River, providing us with a fuller description of the Western Sioux, the Lakota. Perhaps the most detailed accounts come from Jean Baptiste Truteau and Pierre-Antoine Tabeau. Artists like George Catlin have preserved information on clothing and other ethnographic data from the early nineteenth century. The most comprehensive ethnographic account of the Sioux from the earlier part of the century is Edwin Denig's *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri* (1961). Denig gathered material for his book for more than 20 years starting in the 1830s. His work is still considered to be one of the classics in Native American studies (see DeMallie 1975; DeMallie & Parks 2003; DeMallie 2001a, 718–722). An interesting early nineteenth-century description comes from the explorers Meriwether

Lewis and William Clark, who described the Sioux as “the vilest miscreants of the savage race.” The Lakotas were the only tribe with whom they nearly had a serious engagement during their two-year trek across the continent. Still, they too describe them as “stout and bold looking people” (Bergon 1989, 40; Ostler 2004, 13–21).

Neighboring tribes of the Sioux called them *nadowessiwak*, “little snakes.” Sometimes the word has also been translated as “enemy.” In any case, the French turned this Ojibwa word into *Sioux*, which is still the collective term used for these tribes.

The Sioux, however, were and are not a unified nation but a loose group known as the Seven Council Fires, *Ochethi šakowin*. The Seven Council Fires is the mythological origin of all the Sioux people. According to the Sioux, seven tribes formed a fire of seven councils in ancient times. The tribes drifted apart so that each tribe selected its own leaders and living areas, but they maintained relations with each other.

This relationship is most clearly seen in the Sioux language, which has three dialects, Dakhóta, Nakhóta and Lakhóta. People speaking different dialects can understand each other. The Dakhóta-speaking Santees, Yanktons, and Yanktonais form the eastern branch of the Sioux. Traditionally, it has been assumed that the Yanktons and the Yanktonai speak Nakhóta, but the latest linguistic and anthropological studies show that Nakhóta is rather spoken by distinct relatives of the Sioux, the Assiniboine Indians of Montana, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Lakhóta is spoken by the western branch of the Sioux, the Lakotas (*lakhota*). The Lakotas are also known by the name Teton, coming from the Lakota word *thithunwan* (“dwellers on the plains”). The Lakotas are divided into seven tribes (*oyate*), the Oglalas, Hunkpapas, Minneconjous, Brulés, Two Kettles, Sans Arcs, and Black Feet (DeMallie 2001a, 718–722).

By 1825, the Lakotas had occupied an area ranging from the Missouri River west to the Black Hills, and from the southern parts of North Dakota to south of the Platte River in Nebraska. They pushed away the Kiowa, Arikara, and Crow tribes, establishing their status as the strongest tribe of the northern plains during the first decades of the nineteenth century. This was due to the overpowering numbers of the Lakotas as well as to illnesses that devastated other tribes in the region.

Sedentary tribes like the Pawnees and Mandans suffered severely from new illnesses brought by the whites. The Lakotas, who were constantly moving in small bands, were not as affected. Lakota wintercounts, nevertheless, record winters when illnesses struck the Lakotas (Walker 1982). Still, their population grew from approximately 4,000–8,000 at the end of the eighteenth century to 25,000 by the 1820s. The figures are, however, slightly misleading, as early nineteenth-century white observers were unable to recognize all the Lakotas, while the largest figures probably include individuals from other Sioux tribes.

Much of the information on the earliest period and early migration comes from these relatively sparse notes, making it difficult to conclusively determine early Lakota migration patterns. The most thorough analysis can be found in DeMallie (2001a, 718–722, 727–734). Other recent works include Jeffrey Ostler’s *The Plains Sioux and US Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (2004, 21–28) and *The Lakotas and the Black Hills* (2010, 5–27). Older, still valuable studies include George E. Hyde’s *Red Cloud’s Folk* (1975) and *Spotted Tail’s Folk* (1961), and Richard White’s insightful article “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the 18th and 19th Centuries” (1978).

“Where do they all come from?”

Lakota–white relations were relatively peaceful until the 1840s. In the early 1850s, the annual report of the Secretary of War stated that Lakota attacks on the whites were “rare occasions.” Their relations with the United States mostly involved trade, and the network of trading posts expanded to the Lakota territory in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Groups of Lakotas signed a treaty with US representatives to regulate trade in 1815. The Lakotas brought the whites buffalo hides and fur, and the whites paid with their own products, such as knives, kettles, and whisky (DeMallie 2001a, 719–722; DeMallie 2001b 794–795; Ostler 2010, 28–38).

The Lakotas quickly became dependent on white supplies. Already in the 1820s, witnesses reported whiskey-induced disagreements and even bloody fights amongst the Lakotas. The most famous one took place in 1841, when the young aspiring Red Cloud (Mahpiya Luta) killed Bull Bear (Mato Tatanka), the most famous Oglala chief of the time. One wintercount recorded it as the year “they killed each other while drinking.” This event led to the division of the Oglalas and the creation of friction between the supporters of the two parties of the clash. The controversy strongly affected the Lakotas until the 1890s and can still be sensed today. This incident was also reported by Francis Parkman, who spent a summer among the Oglalas in the 1840s while traveling on the newly opened Oregon Trail. Parkman’s *Oregon Trail* (1991) includes valuable information on the Lakota and their country (Olson 1965, 19–22; Walker 1982, 139–140; Parkman 1991, 138–139; Paul 1997, 64–70; Larson 1997, 58–61).

In the 1840s, the whites opened a path from the Missouri River to Oregon and California. The Oregon Trail passed through the southern hunting grounds of the Lakotas. The United States sent troops to secure the passage of the travelers, and in 1845 the first soldiers broke into Lakota territory in the Platte River valley. To protect the trail the government also established forts. They bought several bases from the American Fur Company, which had established a wide trading post network to support its

fur trade. The most famous of these trading posts is Fort Laramie in southeastern Wyoming, acquired in 1849. Fort Laramie quickly became the main military base on the southern Lakota lands, although it also remained a center of trade. In 1851, the federal government invited Indians to Fort Laramie to negotiate a permanent peace on the northern Plains. The official desire to reach an agreement was understandable, as warfare was one of the cornerstones of Plains Indian life. Various warrior groups were constantly on the move on the Plains, and their aims were often unclear to whites (DeMallie 2001a, 732–734; DeMallie 2001b, 795–796; Ostler 2004, 28–39).

Warfare on the Northern Plains

Warfare was a normal state of affairs for the Lakotas. Warfare was seasonal and focused on summer months, as wintertime fighting was difficult for practical reasons. Sometimes war had a broader, political, or land ownership-related reason. On those occasions, large, well-organized campaigns took place, involving hundreds of men. Such campaigns required careful planning, and warrior groups and societies had different tasks depending on their role in the society. Most of the warfare, however, occurred between small groups, and the main goal was to demonstrate courage or to capture horses. One of the earliest accounts of Lakota warfare was written by Jean Baptiste Truteau in the 1790s (cited in DeMallie & Parks 2003). Francis Parkman (1991, 110–253) also commented on Oglala warfare, noting that they had difficulties deciding over common goals.

Bravery was one of the most significant virtues of a Lakota man. Only accomplishment in battle and personal courage brought a man the kind of prestige that he could rise to leadership. The most important way to demonstrate valor was through counting coup. Counting coup did not only entail killing an enemy. The most valuable coup was won by touching a living enemy and leaving him alive. Touching a dead enemy also awarded coup, and up to four men could gain coup by touching an enemy body. Scalping the opponent was a common mark of victory. One of the most famous Lakota leaders, Red Cloud, is known to have collected 80 coups. Biographies of him include James C. Olson's *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (1965), George Hyde's *Red Cloud's Folk* (1975), Robert W. Larson's *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Oglala Lakota* (1997), and R. Eli Paul's *Autobiography of Red Cloud: War Leader of the Oglalas* (1997). These works also discuss Oglala history at length.

The fact that a warrior could show his bravery in many ways affected Lakota war strategy against both rival Indians and the whites. Often the Lakotas failed to present a unified resistance or launch a surprise attack when young men did not heed the advice of their leaders in search of brave

deeds. Many of the most famous Lakota leaders earned their reputation in intertribal warfare. In addition to Red Cloud, Spotted Tail (Šinte Gleška), Crazy Horse (Thašunke Witko), Hump (Cankahu), Gall (Phizi), and Sitting Bull (Tatanka Iyotake) were known for bravery as young men, and their reputation grew fighting against the whites.

Although intertribal warfare often was about showing bravery, it was very real and very violent. Sometimes historians have romanticized Indian warfare, undermining its political and economic impact. While touching a living enemy was honorable and an integral part of Plains Indian warfare, warriors aimed to cause maximum destruction. Warfare had wider political and economic implications. Financial reasons played a role, and particularly the accumulation of horses and the access to trading routes were key aspects of war. Gaining new land for hunting and horse pasturing generated aggressive “politics of expansion,” which led to a domino effect, when tribes took turns in forcing weaker neighbors out of their way (Hassrick 1964, 76–100; White 1978, 321–343; DeMallie 2001b, 794–795; DeMallie & Parks 2003, 66–76; Ostler 2004, 21–24).

Peace on the Northern Plains?

The aim of US officials to achieve permanent peace among the Plains Indian tribes while securing national interests was ambitious, to say the least. Yet the 1851 negotiations near Fort Laramie attracted over 10,000 Indians from various tribes, such as the Crow, Pawnee, Arikara, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and Lakota. After big promises, gifts, and food, the US representatives reported that a satisfactory agreement had been made. Representatives of the tribes had signed a treaty that guaranteed peace. The Indians promised not to attack the settlers. They also permitted the government to establish forts and bases on their lands, and most importantly, agreed not to fight against each other. The federal government could let out a sigh of relief and send more settlers on their way.

From the Indian point of view, the deal was not as simple. Firstly, many did not understand the contents of the agreement. The ability and will of interpreters can be contested, and words on paper did not mean much to Indians at that point in time. They hardly knew they had agreed not to fight each other. In fact, the Lakotas and the Crows continued their skirmishes as if no treaty had been made (DeMallie 2001b, 794–795).

A greater problem for the Indians was the article that appropriated certain areas for certain tribes. These were not actual reservations but hunting grounds the government had allocated to each tribe. Such division of lands was unnecessary from the Indian perspective: they were accustomed to following game wherever they wanted. Although there had always been some neutral grounds between the tribes, such drawing of borders did not

correspond to the realities of life on the Plains. Soon after the signing of the treaty, the Oglalas living south of the Platte River heard that they no longer had the right to be in the area. As a result, the Lakotas took over big areas of land from the Crows, extending their power to the Bighorn Mountains. They viewed this as a replacement for the land lost south of the Platte River.

Clearly, the 1851 agreement meant something else to the Indians than to the federal government. White settlers were allowed to travel in relative peace, partly because the government had promised annuities in addition to blankets, kettles, and flour as compensation for peace. The Lakotas remember 1851 as *Wakpamni tanka*, “the year of the great distribution” (Walker 1982, 141). Part of the Lakotas soon began to live permanently near Fort Laramie in order to have access to the “easy” and prosperous life of the whites. These Indians were soon named *wagluhe*, “the loafers.” Although most of the Lakotas lived far from the fort until the mid-1870s, they gradually grew dependent on the annuities. This dependency caused a lot of division within the Lakotas in the 1860s and 1870s.

As the southern Lakotas, mostly the Oglalas and Brulés, were more frequently in contact with whites along the Oregon Trail and by Fort Laramie, whites were penetrating Lakota lands also in the North. Several military bases were built on the banks of the Missouri River in the Dakota Territory, so that Lakota lands were soon surrounded by a chain of forts. The northern Lakotas such as the Hunkpapa, Minneconjou, and Sans Arcs were suspicious of the forts. Trade in the region was busy, but many of the northern forts became targets of outright attacks. The northern Lakotas were not as friendly toward the whites as their southern relatives.

Recently scholars have sought to understand the Lakota point of view to the early American encroachment on their lands as well as to the ensuing hostilities between the whites and the Lakotas. The Lakotas are no longer considered as passive onlookers but rather as active participants, who tried to adapt to the new circumstances by, for example, adopting new trading patterns, alliances, and even leadership structures. At the same time, scholars like Jeffrey Ostler have placed the Lakota experiences in a wider economic, political, and imperialist framework (Ostler 2004). These approaches can result in a more nuanced understanding of Lakota–US relations in the nineteenth century.

Lakhota Oyate – Lakota Society

Plains Indian societies were typically quite flexible, which has made it difficult for scholars to fully analyze, for example, Lakota society. The best primary sources are James R. Walker, *Lakota Society* (1982) and Clark Wissler, “Societies and Ceremonial Associations in the Oglala Division of the Teton-Dakota” (1912). Valuable information on Lakota culture is also

in *Teton Dakota: Ethnology and History* (1937) by John C. Ewers. A good source that includes terms on kinship and descriptions of social life can be found in *Waterlily* (1988), Ella C. Deloria's famous novel. Important works for understanding Lakota society, culture, and kinship are the memoirs of Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (1975) and *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1978), Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux* (1964), Raymond J. DeMallie, "Kinship and Biology in Sioux Culture" (1994), Catherine Price, *The Oglala People 1841–1879: A Political History* (1996), and Guy Gibbon, *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations* (2003). In "Teton" (2001b) Professor DeMallie makes a modern, thorough analysis of the subject. The following is based primarily on these sources.

The Lakotas had different leaders for different situations and tasks. Similarly, the structure of the entire society depended on the situation. The basic unit of the society was *thiyošpaye* that is best translated as an extended family or lodge group. Smaller units were nuclear families, *tiwabe*, with a man, his wives, and children. *Thiyošpaye* might include various close relatives, so its size ranged from 10 people up to 150.

Each *thiyošpaye* had its own chief, *itancan*. They did not, however, have total authority. Individuals could generally make their own decisions. Anybody could, for example, gather a small group of people and go on a raid. He was followed, if he was seen as a worthy example. A larger unit than the *thiyošpaye* was the subtribe or band, consisting of several *thiyošpaye*. Bands, in turn, formed a larger entity, *oyate*, which best corresponds to "tribe."

There were seven tribes of the Lakotas: the Hunkpapa, Oglala, Minneconjou, Brulé, Sans Arc, Two Kettles, and Black Feet. The Lakota society quickly reacted to changes; people would move from one *thiyošpaye* to another, and new groups were constantly formed under the direction of strong leaders. However, the number of the main tribes of the Lakotas has remained the same. This structure of seven tribes was best visible during big community gatherings. Each tribe and band would have its own place around the great camp circle (*hochoka*), which symbolized the Lakota alliance (*olakhota*). Inside, the sacred circle (*changleška wakan*) was untouchable. In the middle of the circle was the great soldiers' or council lodge, *thiyothipi*, where all the main meetings were held. Around the circle, the Hunkpapas would always be located on either side of the "doorway" *hunkpa*. Other tribes in the order of importance would set up their tipis around the circle.

In addition, each band and even family had its place within their own camp circle inside the great camp circle. The camp circle was very important to the Lakotas. Inside, everything was Lakota. Outside was the hostile world. The Lakotas viewed any Indian who was not Lakota as a potential enemy, *thoka*. Other Indians were called *ikcewichaša*, "common men," and they were related as enemies, *thokakichiyapi*. Sometimes the Lakotas might, however, make peace with other Indians. The tribe then became a part of

the Lakota alliance, *lakholkichiyapi*, as happened with the Cheyennes and Arapahos.

Whites were not originally in the enemy category. They were called *wašicu*, deriving from their mystic powers, mainly powerful firearms. At first the word referred to a particular kind of guardian spirits, usually associated with war. Later, when whites turned out to be mortal, the religious connotation of the word disappeared.

Although there were strict rules for big camp circles, all Lakota camps were built circularly whenever possible, whether they were made up of one *thiyospaye* or an entire subtribe. On the other hand, especially during wintertime, camps were quite informally located along rivers. The camp itself was called *wicothi*, “the place where people live.” The significance of the camp circle materialized in the leadership structure of the society. Depending on times and situations, leadership transferred from the leader of a single *thiyospaye* to men’s warrior societies (*akichita okholakichiye*), or during war, to the war chief (*blotahunka*). During large gatherings, when many tribes convened within one camp circle, the council of chiefs (*naca omniciye*) had the highest decision-making power. The council of chiefs consisted of esteemed men, who were too old to actively serve as hunters or warriors. The council selected men to carry out various tasks in the camp and on hunting or war raids.

The council selected advisors (*wakicunza*), who served as links between chiefs and the people and guided the camp’s moves. Other important leaders chosen by the council were the shirt wearers or “praiseworthy men” (*wichasa yatapika*). They were younger men who had succeeded in war and hunting and were known for their bravery. They were highly esteemed and were expected to fully serve their people with strict discipline and immaculate behavior. The leaders were collectively known as the “leading men,” *wichasa ithankan*. Thus, the Lakotas never identified only one chief with sole responsibility for making decisions. Power and authority as well as leadership tasks were divided between individuals and groups depending on the situation.

Decision-making always required the approval of all chiefs, and finding a solution suitable for all took a long time. Giving speeches was considered a valuable skill. Men known as good speakers might speak for hours. Negotiations with the whites also took a long time, which sometimes made white negotiators not only confused but also aggravated.

Membership in a society was important. Some of the Lakota societies were mostly clubs established for social purposes, which allowed men to bond. They would sing, dance, and tell stories of war or hunting.

Warrior societies, on the other hand, were more solemn communities. Membership was based on merit, and not everyone could join. Visions entitled membership in a particular society. Oglala warrior societies are most extensively studied and the fullest accounts can be found in Wissler (1912)

and DeMallie (2001b). Oglala warrior societies were Crow Owners (*kangi yuha*), Badgers (*ixoka*), Kit Foxes (*tokala*), Brave Hearts (*chante tinza*), Plain Lance Owners (*sotka yuha*), and Packs White (*wicinska*).

Membership in the *sotka yuha* was a particular sign of bravery. Members of the society fastened themselves to the ground in front of the enemy with a lance, preventing them from escaping. Each society had its own special garment, and warriors painted their skin with symbols of their society. Members of Kit Foxes, for example, used a headdress made of wolf skin. Around their neck they wore a fox skin with the head on the front and the tail in the back. They also had an otter skin headband with a coyote jawbone painted blue or red. Crow Owners carried a stuffed crow around their neck.

New warrior societies were created regularly. The most famous of these “new” societies is the Hunkpapa Silent Eaters (*ainila wotapi*). Sitting Bull is said to be its founder, and its name relates to its members convening secretly during the night to discuss tribal affairs but initially dining in complete silence. The society had considerable power, probably because its members consisted of Sitting Bull’s followers. A man could simultaneously be a member of many societies, and Sitting Bull is known to have had an influential position in several societies.

Women also had societies, involving crafts, singing, or dancing. They were more informal than men’s societies, but they too gave women the opportunity to compete in different skills. The most prestigious women’s society was Owns Alone (Lakota name not known), whose members only had intercourse with their own husbands. Another important women’s society was *katela*. Its members had lost their husbands in war. Women also had significant dream societies, in which all society members had seen the same animal in a vision.

Great Trouble Coming

In the late summer of 1854, a small group of Lakotas had set up camp near the Oregon Trail in Nebraska. As usual, they traded with the whites in the nearby Fort Laramie and with the immigrants on the Oregon Trail. One day a caravan of Mormons passed along the Oregon Trail. As usual, they left behind all kinds of goods that the Lakotas could use. This time, a runaway cow wandered to the Lakota camp. The Lakotas were short on food, as there were no buffalo in the area, and annuities had not arrived. Thus, one Lakota shot the cow.

The Mormons rushed over to Fort Laramie, reporting that the Lakotas had stolen the cow. The Lakotas agreed to give a few horses to replace the cow, but they were also requested to turn in the man who shot the cow. Otherwise soldiers would come to the camp to get him.

The Lakotas prepared for the arrival of soldiers. Chief Conquering Bear (Matho Wayuhi) rode to meet the soldiers waving a white flag, trying to convince them that there was no reason for violence. Suddenly, a series of shots were fired, and the chief fell to the ground mortally wounded. Lakota warriors opened fire on the soldiers, and after a while the commanding officer Lieutenant John L. Grattan and all of his men were dead.

After the Grattan fight, several skirmishes took place between the United States and the Lakotas, including the infamous massacre of Indians at Blue Water Creek in September 1855. Still, the Lakotas sought to retain peace with the whites. The number of immigrants, however, grew continuously, causing bigger problems for the Lakotas (Hyde 1961, 68–72; Ostler 2004, 40–44; Ostler 2010, 42–46).

In 1862 explorers found gold on the upper Missouri. Although it was not on Lakota land, diggers traveled through northern Lakota hunting grounds to get to the fields. In 1862 alone, 500–600 gold-miners traveled through Hunkpapa lands. Hunkpapas made several attacks against the whites.

A big shift in Lakota views toward the whites occurred around this time. In 1857 the Lakotas held a great council, where they discussed new strategies to confront the growing white demands. Although approaches varied, they decided that white encroachments had to be stopped, the Black Hills should be protected, yet trade and accepting annuities should continue. As long as the Lakotas did not consider the whites a threat, they classified them differently than Indians. All other Indian tribes were enemies, *thoka*, but whites were just *wašicu*. In 1864, just before the first big battles, the Lakotas decided that killing whites would bring similar honor as killing traditional enemies. The whites also became *thoka* (Hyde 1961, 90; Utey 1994, 46; Bray 2006, 53–56; DeMallie & Parks 2003; Ostler 2010, 46–51).

Unknown to the Lakotas, a new Indian policy was emerging in the mid-1860s. Several religious and humanitarian groups in eastern cities took interest in the Indians. These Friends of the Indian believed that the best way to suppress the “savage” was to demonstrate the superiority of the white man’s way through gifts and friendship. The aim was to gradually direct the Indians to give up their cultures and traditional ways of life.

President Ulysses S. Grant adopted these ideas in his Indian policy. Known as Grant’s Peace Policy, he sought to end the wars with Indians. Key elements included moving the Indians on to reservations, educating and civilizing them, and encouraging assimilation (see Prucha 1986).

The Lakotas witnessed the new policy in the summer of 1866, when representatives of the federal government came to Fort Laramie to call the Lakotas to negotiations. They presented a draft agreement, which stated that the government would be allowed to build roads through Lakota hunting grounds. The treaty also demanded that the Lakotas give up warfare against whites and Indians alike. The Lakotas agreeing to settle down and start farming would receive 10,000 dollars a year for 20 years.

A similar treaty was presented to the Lakotas further north in Fort Sully, where the Hunkpapas led by Sitting Bull refused to negotiate. At Fort Laramie, Red Cloud, one of the Oglala chiefs, eventually arrived. Negotiations, however, stalled immediately, when the Lakotas found out that a military detachment was on its way to establish forts along the Bozeman Trail.

The enraged Lakotas walked out of the negotiations. This was the beginning of a war that is best known by the name given by whites: Red Cloud's War. Studies focusing on Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, or Sitting Bull also deal extensively with this period of Lakota history and explore all the skirmishes and battles of the two-year war. Some Lakota accounts are included in all of these works, but more interesting Lakota eyewitness accounts can be found, for example, in Eleanor Hinman, "Oglala Sources on the Life of Crazy Horse" (1976), Richard Jensen, *Voices of the American West: The Indian Interviews of Eli S. Ricker, 1903–1919* (2006), and White Bull's memoirs (Vestal 1984; Howard 1998). Several Indian accounts are included in *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt 1961) and in *The Sixth Grandfather* (DeMallie 1985), which places these narratives in historical context.

The Lakotas and Cheyennes initiated attacks all along the Bozeman Trail. In July 1866, Colonel Carrington nevertheless began the construction of a new fort, Fort Phil Kearny, along Little Piney River. Shortly thereafter another fort, Fort C. F. Smith, was completed in Montana.

The Lakotas and their allies controlled the Bozeman Trail and attacked both civilian and military caravans. The number of Lakotas, including their allies, rose during 1864–1865 to as many as 8,000 people. Their faith in their own strength undoubtedly grew, as they were able to control the situation from far within their territory, the Black Hills and Powder River country. By the fall of 1866, travel on the Bozeman Trail was practically stalled, and Carrington's forts were left without supplies. In December 1866, the Lakotas managed to destroy Lieutenant William J. Fetterman's troops to the last man. Fighting along the Bozeman trail continued throughout the spring and summer of 1867.

Feeling powerful, the Lakotas announced that they would not negotiate until all white forts on Lakota lands had been abandoned. Red Cloud requested that all forts along the Bozeman Trail be evacuated. At the same time, he wished that the eventual peace treaty would last forever.

On July 29, 1868, soldiers abandoned Fort C. F. Smith, and Fort Phil Kearny and Fort Reno were abandoned a month later. The Lakotas had seized victory. The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie established the Great Sioux Reservation that included the Powder River country and the sacred Black Hills. Whites were not to enter these lands without Lakota permission. Indians were also granted the right to hunt on the off-reservation "unceded territory." The Lakotas agreed to maintain peace in exchange for annuities (DeMallie & Deloria 1999).

Thousands of “free” Lakotas, however, remained outside the reservation, and they wanted nothing to do with whites. This group mostly consisted of northern Lakotas, Hunkpapas, Minneconjous, Itazipcos, O’ohenunpas, and Sisasapas, although hundreds of Oglalas and Brulés joined them. Their most important leaders were Hunkpapas Sitting Bull and Gall as well as the Oglala Crazy Horse. Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, for example, were leading those trying to adapt to reservation life.

Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, like Red Cloud, are the most studied Lakota leaders. An early biography of Sitting Bull was written by Willis Fletcher Johnson titled *The Red Record of the Sioux: Life of Sitting Bull and History of the Indian War of 1890–1891* (1891). The best known biographer is Walter S. Campbell, who wrote *Sitting Bull: The Champion of the Sioux* (1989) under the pen name Stanley Vestal. A modern, excellent work is Robert M. Utley’s *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (1994). Mari Sandoz published the biography *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas* in 1942. In many ways, despite some evident errors, this book is still one of the most readable and fascinating Crazy Horse biographies. Perhaps the most complete is Kingsley M. Bray’s *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life* (2006). In *The Killing of Crazy Horse* (2011), Thomas Powers seeks to analyze the circumstances surrounding Crazy Horse’s death, but also deals extensively with his life story. Joseph Marshall III brings another interesting voice to the studies of Crazy Horse’s life in *The Journey of Crazy Horse: A Lakota History* (2005). Gall, on the other hand, has remained relatively unknown until Robert W. Larson’s biography *Gall: Lakota Warchief* (2009).

It was clear that the Fort Laramie treaty had divided the Lakotas into reservation Indians and free Lakotas. Clear differences began to appear between the groups, when some were in constant contact with, or dependent on, whites, while others continued the traditional lifestyle. In the beginning, reservation life was not very restricted, and even Red Cloud did not immediately settle on to his new Indian agency. Excellent studies of life on the reservation include works such as *Red Cloud’s Folk* (Hyde 1975) and *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Olson 1965). Valuable information is included in the memoirs of the Indian Agents. Agent Valentine T. McGillicuddy, who had a long power struggle on Pine Ridge Reservation with Red Cloud, tells his story in *McGillicuddy, Agent: A Biography of Dr. Valentine McGillicuddy*, which was published by his wife Julia (1941). On Standing Rock Reservation Agent James McLaughlin had a similar struggle with Sitting Bull. His book *My Friend the Indian* (1989/1910), like McGillicuddy’s, gives a first-hand albeit a biased look on reservation life. There would still be a need for new studies focusing on the ways in which the Lakotas sought to adapt to life on reservations.

During the early 1870s, incidents between the Lakotas and the whites increased. The railroad approached northern Lakota lands, and pioneers in

Montana and Wyoming grew more eager to take over Lakota lands. Rumors of gold in the Bighorn Mountains and Black Hills added to their interest.

In 1874, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer led a “scientific” expedition to the Black Hills to verify the rumors. His group included a journalist, who reported that there was more gold than anyone could imagine. The situation was ready to explode. Custer’s discovery started the chain of events that led to the Little Bighorn Battle and ultimately to the surrender of the Lakota people.

The federal government struggled to keep its promise to prevent white exploration of the Black Hills. Several battles occurred in 1874, and at the same time the Lakotas fought the Crows in the west along the Powder and Yellowstone Rivers. This distressed the white settlers in the Northern Plains, who wrote to Washington, claiming the area was controlled by Sitting Bull and his wild Indians. In reality, the Lakotas rarely went near white towns. The issue escalated in 1875, when the United States tried to purchase the Black Hills, and the Lakotas refused to give up their sacred mountains. Lakota accounts of the negotiations can be found, for example, in *The Sixth Grandfather* and *Voices of the American West: The Indian Interviews of Eli S. Ricker, 1903–1919*. The government had to find a reason to wage war, and the unrest proved an easy excuse. The Lakotas were given an ultimatum: they should arrive at their agencies by January 31, 1876. All others would be classified as hostile and at war against the United States.

The Indians thought the request was ridiculous. They were not at war, and returning to the agency in the middle of winter was nearly impossible. Their concept of time did not include exact dates, and they were content with promising a return sometime in the spring. The Lakotas may have thought the ultimatum senseless, but the United States now had an excuse to treat them as enemies. The Lakotas had not obeyed the orders, though the ultimate goal was to steal the Black Hills (Olson 1965, 199–216; DeMallie 1985, 162–173; Lazarus 1991, 80–83; Ostler 2004, 60–62).

During the spring and summer of 1876, an increasing number of Lakotas arrived in Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse’s camp in the Powder River country. According to some estimates, there were 7,000–8,000 people in the camp in June. It was a time of happiness in the free Lakota camp. The Indians believed in their power and were prepared to protect their lands.

On June 17, 1876, the Lakotas almost succeeded in surprising General George Cook’s troops by the Rosebud River, but Crow and Shoshone scouts spotted the Lakotas and alerted the US soldiers. This resulted in a full-day battle, in which fortune shifted between the Lakotas and the soldiers. Both the Army and the Indians left the scene believing they had been victorious. After the Rosebud battle, the Lakotas set up camp along the Little Bighorn River in Montana. The camp was big enough to span several miles along the river.

As the Army converged on the Indians, Colonel Custer led his 7th Cavalry up the Little Bighorn River. On June 22, Custer searched for signs of the Indian camp. He did not find the camp itself but discovered signs of its existence. Custer's scouts warned him that the camp seemed to be a very large one. On June 25, scouts announced they saw a large camp in the horizon. At first Custer planned an attack for the next day, but he feared the Indians would notice him and escape, which led him to decide to attack the same day. He did not heed his scouts' warnings that such a large camp should not be attacked. The 7th Cavalry started preparations for attack in the early hours of June 25, 1876, which ended in disaster for Custer and many of his men.

In the last 20 years, a number of Indian accounts of the battle and the events leading to it have been gathered and published. Works such as *Lakota Noon: The Indian Narrative of Custer's Defeat* (Michno 1997), *Lakota Recollections of the Custer Fight: New Sources on Indian-Military History* (Hardorff 1997), *Indian Views of the Custer Fight: A Source Book* (Hardorff 2005), and *The Day when the World Ended at Little Bighorn: A Lakota History* (Marshall 2008), among others, reveal a picture of dramatic hand to hand fighting, chaos, and extraordinary leadership qualities by men like Crazy Horse, Gall, and White Bull. By their own example these men led the Lakota charge against the cavalry. Even young men like Black Elk, about 14 or 15 at the time, participated in the fighting. Gall noted that the smoke and dust made the day look like night and impaired his ability to see the soldiers while riding over them. White Bull, who claimed to be Custer's slayer, also said that he was counting coup left and right that day (Howard 1998, 51–62; see also Miller 1963; Viola 1999; Marquis 2003).

While Crazy Horse led the fighting, Sitting Bull remained in the camp, directing the safe withdrawal of women and children. He may have participated in the battle in the very beginning, stepping back as it proceeded. This led the whites to accuse him of cowardice. Even some historians have accepted this as fact, failing to see that in 1876 Sitting Bull was over 40 years old and his role was to lead his people with advice and intelligent decisions. Nevertheless, the perception of Sitting Bull's cowardice lived on in the white imagination. Despite the misunderstanding, he soon became known as the conqueror of Custer (Johnson 1891, 178–179; McLaughlin 1989, 215–222, 406–417; see Vestal 1989; Utley 1994).

On that June day, the US Army suffered its greatest loss in its wars against Plains Indians. A few days before the battle, Sitting Bull had seen a vision during a sun dance, in which soldiers fell head-first into the Lakota camp. This had been interpreted as the Lakotas winning a great victory. Sitting Bull's prophecy had come to pass. The importance of Sitting Bull's vision should not be overlooked. For the Lakotas, the Sun Dance was one of the most important religious ceremonies along with the vision quest (*hanblech-eyapi*). As a medicine man Sitting Bull was known to be very powerful, and

his visions often came true. At Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull showed his powers once again (see DeMallie 1985; Vestal 1989; Utley 1994).

Custer's fate caused unparalleled turbulence among the whites. The Army was furious, and the press soon published sensational stories of the massacre committed by bloodthirsty savages. Although the Indians were the main culprits in the catastrophe, the press soon began to search for other felons. Custer's doom shook the United States as well as the authorities of Indian policy. The biggest blame, however, was put on the Army and Custer himself. He was said to have underestimated Indian power and neglected his duty. This also created the myth that Sitting Bull and other Indian "generals" beat the Army with brilliant tactics and leadership skills. According to some rumors, Sitting Bull had graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point (Johnson 1891). The myth of the Little Bighorn assumed a life of its own.

Conclusion

The United States took action against the Lakotas and their allies after the battle of Little Bighorn. The Army quickly received reinforcements, and the Indians were compelled to surrender during a winter campaign. The federal government also turned its attention to the Lakotas residing on reservations. During the previous summer, officials had been forced to give up the purchase of Black Hills, when a sufficient number of signatures had not been gathered. This time the government was set on succeeding, regardless of Lakota demands or the 1868 treaty promises. Pressure from the government quickly brought results, and the Lakotas soon signed an agreement in which they surrendered the Black Hills to the United States (see, e.g., Olson 1965; Hyde 1961; Hyde 1975; Ostler 2010).

Several fights occurred between the Lakotas and the Army during the winter of 1876–1877. To General Miles's surprise, Sitting Bull wanted to negotiate, and one day the soldiers found his message. Written in English, it requested the soldiers to leave Sitting Bull's lands. He announced that he never wanted to fight against the whites; he only wanted to live peacefully and to hunt freely on his own lands. If the whites, however, would not leave, he would fight again (Vestal 1989, 181–230; Utley 1994, 165–210; Ostler 2004, 64–82).

The winter was severe on the Lakotas. Generals Crook and Miles continuously harassed them. Although the Army was better equipped and more strongly manned, it was unable to give the final blow. Both parties suffered minor losses. The continuous fighting nevertheless weakened the Lakotas, because the Army destroyed many winter camps, driving the Indians into freezing weather without food or supplies. Hunting was unsuccessful during the harsh winter, leaving several families demoralized and malnourished.

Gradually small groups of Lakotas surrendered, and in the spring of 1877 Crazy Horse gave up fighting. Sitting Bull and more than 200 Lakotas fled to Canada, where they remained until 1881 (see DeMallie 1985, 197–207; DeMallie 1993, 329–332; Ostler 2004, 77–105; Bray 2006, 253–390). The Great Sioux Wars were over.

The Indian Wars were over by 1890, but interest in them captured attention for years to come. Throughout the twentieth century, Indian Wars were featured in literature, film, television, magazines, journals, books, and other forms of cultural production. They gave rise to many legends and myths of the American West. The Little Bighorn battle was not an exception; on the contrary, it is a prime example of a historical event that has taken a life of its own. Stories, legends, heroes, and villains emerged from the fighting that took place on that battlefield in 1876.

In recent years, a more balanced account of the Lakota Sioux in the controversial battle has been achieved through cross-disciplinary approaches. Scholars from many fields, like anthropology, history, ethnohistory, archeology, and even biology have provided readers with a better understanding of what Little Bighorn represented to the various parties involved. This development is poignantly presented by the history of the naming of the battlefield, which has been under the administration of the National Park Service since 1940. In 1886, the battlefield and adjoining cemetery were designated as the National Cemetery of Custer's Battlefield Reservation. In 1946, it became the Custer Battlefield National Monument. In 1991, it became Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. In the beginning, the battlefield mostly displayed the heroics of the 7th Cavalry but neglected the Indian points of view. In recent years, a new monument for Indian casualties has been created. Today, native accounts are an integral part of the story presented to tourists.

Perhaps a more balanced understanding of Little Bighorn has been achieved, but there is still more to be seen from the Lakota point of view. Historians still do not have a clear understanding of how the Lakotas tried to change their leadership and other social structures to confront the threats to their homeland. There are fragments of information that show that the Lakotas were not merely passive onlookers but active participants in the events that reached a culmination point at Little Bighorn in 1876 and Wounded Knee in 1890. To reach a more profound understanding of Lakota culture, resistance, and survival, we need to dig deeper into cross-disciplinary approaches and revisit archival sources that can give us new insights into Lakota memories and history. Therefore, books such as *Voices of the American West* by Richard Jensen (2006) and the recently published *Witness: A Hunkpapha Historian's Strong Heart Song of the Lakotas* by Josephine Waggoner (2014) are extremely valuable. They make rare archival sources with Lakota voices available to all, thus enriching everyone's understanding of the past.

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