

Searching for the Spirit of Crazy Horse: A Rhetorical Analysis of Competing Myths

BY

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Communication Studies and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Date Defended: June 5, 2014

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Date approved: June 5, 2014

Abstract

In this thesis I look at three different biographical reconstructions of Crazy Horse that construct the famous Lakota man as a mythic hero. Through the lens of myth and narrative theory, I identify three different ways in which Crazy Horse has been portrayed as a heroic individual: 1) as a heroic warrior for his leadership role in defeating U.S. forces at the Battle of the Little Bighorn 2) for his generosity to his people in a time of traumatic change and 3) for his willingness to sacrifice his life to end the violent conflict between Sioux and U.S. military forces. I argue that Crazy Horse presents a unique opportunity for biographers to offer competing myths about his life because we know so little about him, aside from his accomplishments. Thus, the lack of primary resources about the life of Crazy Horse provides an opportunity for each biographer to construct Crazy Horse in a way that serves their own purpose in telling his story.

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Crazy Horse was dead. He was brave and good and wise. He never wanted anything but to save his people, and he fought the Wasichus only when they came to kill us in our own country. He was only thirty years old. They could not kill him in battle. They had to lie to him and kill him that way... It does not matter where his body lies, for it is grass; but where his spirit is, it will be good to be.

(Black Elk, 1932)

On June 3, 1948, the first blast into the mountainside echoed through the Black Hills of South Dakota. Approximately 17 miles from the iconic Mt. Rushmore, a new face began to emerge from the rock. However, the emerging figure would not be an image of a former American president. Nor would it take the shape of any other historic American citizen. Rather, the latest edition of visual rhetoric in the Black Hills commemorates the life of perhaps the greatest warrior this continent has ever seen—the Lakota man named Crazy Horse.

Although the project was conceived by members of the Sioux tribe, they lacked the financial resources and engineering experience to accomplish such a task. As such, descendants of Crazy Horse teamed up with the non-Indian architect Korczak Ziolkowski, a sculptor from Connecticut, who initially conceived of the statue being 563 feet tall by 641 feet wide. The finished monument will depict Crazy Horse riding atop his pony and pointing out over the land he fought to protect. To date, construction on the monument has been consistent with Ziolkowski's vision. As a way to assess the magnitude of the mountain sculpture, each head of Mt. Rushmore is 60 feet tall and all four presidential images "can sit inside the lone head of Crazy Horse" which sits 219 feet high gazing upon the terrain (Rand, CNN article). This colossal transformation of the landscape has drawn the attention of tourists for over half a century. Those visiting the monument are able to see the transformation occur and are invited to learn about the cultures of American Indians at the cultural museum housed by the memorial

foundation. More recently, a report claims that admission fees at the Crazy Horse Memorial totaled 3.8 million dollars alongside an estimated 19 million dollars in public donations from 2007-2012 (Rand, CNN article). Federally recognized tribal members are not charged admission thereby demonstrating that the Crazy Horse Memorial attracts visitors from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

It makes sense that the sheer dimensions of the Crazy Horse Memorial would attract the attention of so many. Because the project boasts to be the “largest mountain carving” in the world once it is completed, it has become a spectacle of human achievement. The gigantic dimensions, however, have served to elongate the construction process, which is complicated by the fact that the Crazy Horse memorial relies solely on public donations and admission fees for funding. At this time, there is no estimated date of completion. As it took nearly half a century before the face of Crazy Horse even became noticeable from the rock, this lack of a specific end point comes as little surprise. Although the statue is still not finished and Mr. Ziolkowski has been dead for over 30 years, his family now heads a non-profit organization dedicated to the manifestation of Ziolkowski’s vision of the famous warrior. According to the memorial’s website, the architect’s dying words to his wife were: “You must work on the mountain—but go slowly so you do it right” (FAQ section). Ziolkowski’s supposed final words could not be more appropriate for perhaps the most famous American Indian in the American imagination. Indeed, it seems that people are always in the process of trying to get Crazy Horse “right.”

American history recognizes the influence of several American Indian leaders and warriors. Yet, few American Indians have received as much attention as Crazy Horse. Most notable for his leadership role in the volatile conflict of U.S. expansionism and Sioux resistance to assimilation and the annexation of their homelands, Crazy Horse’s intransigent devotion to the

traditional Sioux way of life has continuously drawn the attention of researchers, biographers, anthropologists, historians, film-makers, politicians, and American Indian activists. Initially, Crazy Horse became a prominent figure through military accounts of frontier soldiers who witnessed the enigmatic warrior in battle. Grimes (2000) tells us that these military accounts portrayed Crazy Horse as an “equestrian-predator whom the army not only feared but praised and admired as a formidable foe” (p. 279). Stories of a warrior that rode out in front of his companions to taunt enemies yet remaining unharmed permeated throughout discussions of frontier battles involving the Sioux. In this way, Crazy Horse’s warrior prowess was admired for his courage and competency in battle while at the same time his capabilities were perceived as a formidable threat to U.S. expansionism. Prior to Crazy Horse, the perception of American Indians was such that they were a nuisance that did not have the warring capacity to rival U.S. forces. With the leadership of Crazy Horse, however, the Sioux became a formidable presence in defense of their homelands. As such, military accounts constructed a formidable enemy, which spurred a shift in American policy that would force the Sioux to be subjugated or exterminated (Haines, 2002).

In addition to the world’s largest mountain carving and early accounts by frontier soldiers, the prominence of Crazy Horse in the American imagination can be seen throughout popular culture. In 1955 Universal Pictures released the western *Chief Crazy Horse* in theatres throughout the nation as a fictionalized biography of the Lakota warrior. With a runtime of 86 minutes, audiences were invited to see Crazy Horse and, subsequently, American Indians in a more sympathetic light than earlier accounts, which was uncustomary for the time. In 1996 a 90 minute TV movie titled *Crazy Horse* aired on a national television. Nominated for two primetime Emmys, *Crazy Horse* featured American Indian actors and is considered to be

influenced by several biographers of Crazy Horse, including Mari Sandoz's seminal 1942 account. More recently Crazy Horse appeared again on television in the TNT miniseries *Into The West* (2005), which was directed by Steven Spielberg. In the miniseries, Tatanka Means was cast as a young Crazy Horse whose appearance in the show was brief but impactful—viewers see a stoic Crazy Horse calmly walk his horse away from an onslaught of gunfire from angry military personnel.

The prevalence of Crazy Horse in popular culture is not limited to just motion pictures and television. The Crazy Horse name has become a symbol in its own right capable of evoking associations with frontier themes and the strength of American Indian culture. One example of this can be seen in the band Crazy Horse, headed by Neil Young, who have toured off and on since the 1960s. There is even a French cabaret called Le Crazy Horse de Paris which features performances from nude dancers, magicians, and mimes. While many of the examples I have mentioned draw a positive light on the famous Lakota, a recent dispute over the manufacturing and distribution of malt liquor bearing the name of Crazy Horse reached federal courts. The *Baltimore Sun* (2000) reported that representatives of the Crazy Horse “family” demanded that distribution of Crazy Horse malt liquor cease and organized a national boycott of the product claiming that the alcoholic beverage “misappropriated the name of its [Lakota Nation] most cherished leader” with disregard for the punitive damages on descendants of Crazy Horse (“Crazy Horse beverage fight goes to federal court”). Subsequently, Crazy Horse malt liquor was pulled from shelves thereby demonstrating that the Crazy Horse name carries considerable weight within American Indian and non-Native communities.

Another example of the notoriety of Crazy Horse can be seen in a lengthy list of books that attempt to tell his life story. Since his death in 1877, twentieth century writers have

published over a dozen biographical works focused on Crazy Horse. Due to military accounts portraying Crazy Horse as a larger than life legend, each writer has attempted to humanize the warrior in an effort to understand what he was like as a person. Grimes tells us that in the 1920's and 30's a significant body of literature began to develop in search of an Indian point of view of westward expansion. As such, a dialogue opened in which "older Indians" were given an opportunity to provide their interpretations of the closing of the frontier (p. 283). The interviewing of "older" Indians provided key insights for historians, popular writers, and anthropologists to revise American perceptions of the frontier experiences of fighting Indians, which had often been misconceived and misrepresented in historical accounts of American Indian resistance to American expansionism. Interviews with warriors that had interactions with Crazy Horse provided insightful information that would culminate in the first biographical works on Crazy Horse in the 1940's. In her seminal biographical work *Crazy Horse: the strange man of the Oglalas*, Mari Sandoz was the first to attempt to provide a historical account that "transcended the military record" by providing Lakota viewpoints that described the warrior in terms of what he meant to his people in their conflict with U.S. forces (Grimes, 2000, p. 287). Although widely cited as the first substantive biography, the criticism of Sandoz's work has been that her accounts overtly romanticized the story of Crazy Horse and do not hold up to the rigors of historical writing.

Since Sandoz's initial work, over a dozen writers have competed for a more valid interpretation of the events that help elucidate the exceptional warrior. To note just a few of these novels, Shannon Garst, a prolific author of Western tales, published *Crazy Horse: A Great Warrior of the Sioux* in 1950. In 1976, Robert Clark published the edited volume, *The Killing of Chief Crazy Horse: Three Eyewitness Views by the Indian Chief He Dog, the Indian-white*

William Garnett, the White Doctor Valentine McGillicuddy. This was followed just five years later by Edward Kadlecek and Mabell Kadlecek's *To Kill and Eagle: Indian Views on the Death of Crazy Horse*. In 1995, Wil Blevins published his award-winning biographical novel, *Stone Song: A Novel of the Life of Crazy Horse*. The famed writer of western fiction Larry McMurtry added his own take on Crazy Horse in 1999 as he attempted to portray the Lakota man as an extraordinary character in a western drama. A few years later, the story of Crazy Horse was interpreted again by Kingsley Bray, an independent researcher and Lakota historian, in the 2008 *Crazy Horse: a Lakota Life*, which attempted to provide insight into the private life of Crazy Horse and discover what made the legendary warrior tick. As is evidenced by these examples, Crazy Horse has been and remains an enigma in search of a solution.

As I have shown, Crazy Horse has, for many years, remained a significant cultural icon, and even 135 years after his death people are still trying to make sense of him. Certainly he has come to mean many things to different people. In fact, Grimes (2000) argues that, since his death, Crazy Horse has been elevated in popular and academic literature from "a respected warrior into a symbolic legend" (p. 278). Drawing upon the works of one of the most well-respected Sioux historians, George E. Hyde, Grimes points out that Crazy Horse represents a "kind of Sioux Christ" and suggests that over the years he has become the "Lakota symbol of resistance to white domination and cultural assimilation" (pp. 277-278). However, Grimes concludes that the "conundrum" with the emergence of Crazy Horse as the "definitive Indian hero" is that we know very little about who he was as a person. Indeed, the difficulty that biographers and historians face is that information regarding Crazy Horse is drawn exclusively from second and third hand accounts. Put simply, Crazy Horse left few traces behind. While Crazy Horse is considered a man of distinction on the battlefield, he is also known to have been a

shy, reclusive individual that was disengaged from social and political life. To date, there is no substantial evidence that Crazy Horse produced any sort of public address. Because he was illiterate, he did not leave any letters behind. In fact, nobody even has a clear idea of what he looked like because he never allowed his picture to be taken, although there is a photograph of a Lakota man that is reported to allegedly be Crazy Horse that has sparked some controversy (Heriard, 2004, p. 16). However, most historians and Sioux descendants question the authenticity of the photograph because it is common knowledge that Crazy Horse would not allow his picture to be taken for fear of losing his soul. Moreover, the man in the photograph does not fit the description of Crazy Horse given by his companions. Thus, images of the warrior, including the Crazy Horse Memorial, come from recollections of military personnel who claim to have seen him in battle and interviews with Sioux people that knew him, which were conducted years after his death.

To use Richard Grimes phrase, insufficient evidence of who Crazy Horse was, as a person, have made him a historical figure “enclosed in an aura of mysticism” (2000, p. 282). Far from restricting what can be written about Crazy Horse, the lack of primary sources about the Lakota warrior actually opens up the possibility for each Crazy Horse biographer and historian to construct their narrative with a fair amount of latitude. Indeed, that so little can actually be proven about Crazy Horse, from what he did to what he looked like, only lends itself to the mythic nature of the narrative accounts of Crazy Horse’s life. This is, I believe, why so many authors have attempted to retell the story of Crazy Horse—the mythic nature of the Lakota warrior allows each author the opportunity to write the Crazy Horse myth to his or her own ends. Even when attempting to uncover the real Crazy Horse, authors are forced to construct the narrative from second and third-hand accounts of others. Inevitably, such retellings take on a

mythic quality with distinct characteristics and purposes. Put simply, that so little is actually known about Crazy Horse seems to call forth repeated attempts to get the story correct, but each new narrative account of Crazy Horse can do little but re-envision the *myth* of Crazy Horse.

Of course, myths are far more than mere-stories; they are imbued with cultural significance. Therefore, each new mythic account of Crazy Horse, no matter how much the author might believe he or she is acting as historian or investigative journalist, offers a new cultural significance to Crazy Horse. To demonstrate this, I offer careful analysis of three such recent mythic retellings of Crazy Horse: Stephen Ambrose's *Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors* (1975), Joseph Marshall's *The Journey of Crazy Horse: A Lakota History* (2004), and Thomas Power's *The Killing of Crazy Horse* (2010). Although these three books only scratch the surface of all that has been written about Crazy Horse, they do represent three important and distinct perspectives on the Crazy Horse myth—from an award-winning historian (Ambrose), a Lakota Indian (Marshall), and a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist (Powers). Unique as each of these three perspectives are, each one re-mythologizes Crazy Horse. Indeed, I argue in this thesis that each of the three authors constructs a quite distinct mythic account of Crazy Horse that emphasize very different perspectives on what made him a heroic figure. Through the lens of myth and narrative theory, I specifically identify three different ways in which Crazy Horse has been portrayed as a heroic individual: 1) as a heroic warrior for his leadership role in defeating U.S. forces at the Battle of the Little Bighorn (Ambrose); 2) for his selfless generosity to his people in a time of traumatic change (Marshall); and 3) for his willingness to sacrifice his life to end the violent conflict between Sioux and U.S. military (Powers). Far from getting at the truth of the Lakota leader, each author activates a different mythic narrative out of the very polysemic legend that is Crazy Horse.

In order to make this argument, this these moves forward in four parts. First, I offer a few basic “facts” about the life of Crazy Horse. Second, I offer some theoretical framework for reading the three Crazy Horse biographies in this study as a form of mythic narrative. Third, I engage in an analysis of the three books to demonstrate how each text presents the Crazy Horse myth in distinct ways. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this study for how Crazy Horse is remembered and how the United States continues to deal with its troubled past.

Crazy Horse—What We Think We Know

Although I argue that each of the authors in this study emphasize quite different aspects of the Crazy Horse legend to further their own arguments about the importance of his life, it would be wrong to suggest that most biographers and historians do not agree on some basic “facts” about Crazy Horse the man. First, we know that the name Crazy Horse was passed down to him by his father who was a Lakota holy man. In fact, the English translation of his name—Crazy Horse—might more accurately be understood as His-Horse-Is-Crazy. Although historians have not been able to accurately determine his date of birth, we know that his lifespan paralleled conflict between Sioux and U.S. forces across the nineteenth century. That is, he was a very young witness to the first violent conflict between the two nations, and his death at Camp Robinson in 1877 marked the end of the Sioux Wars. As for his appearance, he is said to have been of light complexion with curly hair (his childhood name was Curly), both uncharacteristic physical traits for Sioux people.

Perhaps the most notable trait of Crazy Horse was his exceptional warrior qualities. As a young man, he began to prove himself in battle against neighboring tribes, which gave him rare stature within his community. The tactics Crazy Horse used in battle are most often attributed to

his leadership role in two of the most substantial losses U.S. forces have suffered on American soil, including the infamous Battle of the Little Bighorn, otherwise known as Custer's Last Stand. While details about how Crazy Horse presented himself in battle are vague, it is commonly accepted amongst historians and biographers that he would taunt U.S. forces, riding out ahead of all other warriors to lure unsuspecting military personnel into traps. Such feats fostered the notion many Lakota held that he could not be harmed by enemy bullets and was capable of hitting anything he shot at.

Indeed, Crazy Horse survived every battle he ever fought in, and he ultimately died at the U.S. military outpost Camp Sheridan on September 5, 1877. But as with most things related to Crazy Horse, even his death has been a contentious event among biographers and historians. Despite its occurrence at a military fort with members of the Sioux tribe and U.S. soldiers bearing witness, the evidence remains inconclusive as to what exactly occurred that day. What we do know is that Crazy Horse had surrendered as a means to end the conflict with the U.S. military. At the time, rumors permeated throughout the agency that Crazy Horse's very existence would disrupt the adjustment Sioux had begun to make to agency life. That is to say, many thought his presence would result in further conflict and bloodshed as he would never accept the new way of life. As a result, Crazy Horse's attempt to surrender resulted in an attempt to imprison him. When realizing this, Crazy Horse supposedly tried to fight his way free and was mortally wounded by a military issued bayonet. There is a large measure of speculation that Crazy Horse's death was a result of his own people preventing his escape, a notion historians often use to liken his stature to Christ who was also "betrayed in the end by his own disciples" (Grimes, 2000, p. 277).

Mythic Narrative

In the field of rhetoric, narrative has long been understood as integral to the way people persuade and influence one another. Despite this long history, the importance of narrative to human understanding has led scholars to almost continuously reengage such work. Perhaps this is due to narrative consuming such broad theoretical grounds. Whatever the reason, some continue to believe that our understanding of the rhetorical nature of narrative remains inadequate and that there is inherent value in understanding stories because they continue to inform, persuade and socialize societies. In this way stories contain knowledge that constitute a particular world and “our discourse about the world makes the world what we find it to be” (Phelan, 1996).

Moreover, narrative is the means by which myths take their form.

Before going any farther it is necessary to develop an understanding about what is meant by narrative and, more specifically, the ways that narratives function rhetorically. Narrative is often thought to be synonymous with a story. However, Phelan (1996) points out, “narrative is not just story but also action” (p. 8). For Phelan, the rhetorical dimension in narrative is a result of the storyteller having a particular purpose in mind. That is, narrativizing a story entails a connection to present concerns for an audience. Herman (2009) states that narrative can be viewed as “a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process and change” by offering heuristics on why people engage, or do not, in certain actions and reactions (p. 2). In order for societies to have an understanding of what has happened in past events or to provide an understanding of what a person was feeling at a particulate time, a narrative must be developed. However, this does not mean that the narrative will necessarily be factually accurate. There is an inevitability that “a fictional element intrudes” in the process of developing a narrative (Barber, 2010). Furthermore, the narrative may not stay consistent with other narratives about the same

occurrence because when information is “incomplete” there are “gaps” in a given narrative that must be filled in to make sense of character motives and connect events that construct “a background in which the story is played” (pp. 167-168).

Given that narratives are developed to make sense of information that is frequently incomplete, it entails the notion that narratives focus on an event or person of special significance to provide substance to a story. In this way, narratives can be used for political purposes because they emphasize particular values so that we may revisit past events to cope or come to terms with present circumstances. That is to say, we choose to remember something because we feel it is of some value. Moreover, the event or person remembered functions as a reference point in which the storyteller may instruct audiences on a particular action to take, or not to take. Tambling (1991) points out that narrative serves a cultural function by representing reality in an attempt to “construct ways of thinking for us” (p. 66). Storytelling becomes the foundation for which people make sense of “themselves, one another, and the world” in an ongoing, dynamic process (Herman, 2009). This is not to say that narratives are overtly biased or totally fictional. Rather, narratives are meant to socialize people with acceptable cultural behaviors. As such, the narrative can also be representative of a particular culture or universal human trait. In a similar way, Kirkwood (1992) tells us that rhetors may tell “stories of deeds which reflect characters’ states of mind, or they may enable or challenge people to perform such acts themselves” (p. 31).

Another example of how narratives function rhetorically is that they provide a particular way of looking at a person or event. Using an example of Japanese history textbooks to condition and privilege a particular point of view on Japanese militarism, Inuzuka (2013) suggests that “competing narratives” of the past are often present in educational settings that

often contain “very pragmatic reasons for promoting one version over another” (p. 134). Inuzuka states that such narratives are “internalized” by students thereby influencing “subsequent reception of information from other sources” (pp. 134-135). In a similar way, Herman (2009) points out that “narrative allows for more or less direct, explicit reflection on – for critical and reflexive engagement with – competing accounts of the world as experienced” (p. 151). Herman continues to say that “narrative is unique in this respect” because narratives offer an “environment” in which versions of past events may be put side by side for interpretations that attempt to make sense of the world (p. 151). Such a point underlies the idea that narratives represent a reality imagined by an author whom, through interpretation of available resources, constructs a narrative that is purposeful and persuasive. The result is rarely an authentic representation of reality thereby opening the door for other narratives to develop and *compete* for precedence.

Understood through this scholarship, narratives are more than stories. They are also epistemic, which is to say that narratives play an integral role in how people come to know themselves and the world around them. Of course, not all narratives are created equal, and the mythic narrative plays a particularly significant role in a culture’s understanding of itself.

The term myth itself is often reduced to the rudimentary explanation that myth is nothing more than a story. While myths are in fact stories, they entail more than a simple transmission of information. Slotkin (1985) finds that myths are “stories, drawn from history” that have been “traditionalized” through a process by which a society has transformed historical experience into narrative thereby providing a “symbolizing function that is central to the cultural functioning of the society that produces them” (p. 16). Slotkin’s notion of myth is not a new concept; myths have exhibited this potential for thousands of years. Kearney (2002) points out that for ancient

Greeks, “myths were stories people told about themselves in order to explain themselves to themselves and to others” (p. 3). Moreover, myths are social constructs that have the potential to transform time “from an impersonal passing of fragmented moments into a pattern, a plot, a mythos” (p. 4). By design, myths draw on historical experience to create a “metaphoric connection between the storied past and the present” thereby enabling audiences to witness a pivotal point in a society’s lived experience (Kearney, 2002). Because myths are not restricted to the rigors of historical accuracy, they enable static interpretations of past events that are influenced by the individual telling the story and the circumstances of the society being addressed.

More recently, Doty (2004) has argued that myths are “enacted narratives” that typically involve societal matters considered central to worldviews, attitudes, behaviors and perspectives (p. 19). As myths function as “symbolic representations of cultural priorities, beliefs, and prejudices,” they provide a platform for narrators to socialize subsequent generations (ibid). Rowland (1985) has argued that because myths represent “a way of looking at the world” they provide “moral paradigms defining good and bad behavior and structuring society” (p. 7). In effect, myths may tell us of how a society was developed while simultaneously instructing a society on the moral codes that organize a particular society. Because myths provide alternatives and solutions to moral problems, they are reliant upon the narrator’s emphasis on particular values and morals that should be emulated or, in some cases, reintegrated in modern society.

In order for myths to provide humans with the ability to “deal” with moral problems, Rowland offers four characteristics of mythic form. First, in each mythic story there must be a hero capable of responding to the needs of his or her community. This heroism entails an ability to overcome problems faced in a society. Rowland says that although there is no single heroic

character mold to which others can be measured, a heroic character must exhibit heroic qualities that are proportionate to the problems faced (p. 10). A hero is the individual that rises to the demands of the occasion and acts for the good of his or her community. As such, the hero also plays a vital role in saving or sustaining the community itself. And of course, sometimes the hero must play the sacrificial role, giving his or her life so that the community might live.

The second function Rowland attributes to myths is that they exist outside of “historical” time. (pp. 10-11). That is, myths typically “retell the story of actual historical events at the beginning or end of a society” and retelling stories in this way enables humans to tap into the power associated with “perfect beginnings or transcendent endings” (p. 11). Rather than simply the account of an event that happens within the historical record of a community, myths are inflection points that reveal transformational moments for a society. Surely this helps explain why so much attention is given to the heroic qualities of America’s “Founding Fathers.”

The third formal characteristic Rowland attributes to myths is their symbolic geography. Because myth involve heroic and extraordinary characters doing exceptional things they typically are situated in divine places or an “earthly place with special power” (p. 12). That is, the setting of a myth most often occurs in a place that has special significance in the social imagination of a community. This is certainly one reason why in the United States so many fictional movies of mythic heroes take place in New York City, which with its long history and Statue of Liberty holds a unique place in the American imagination.

The fourth characteristic Rowland attributes to myth is that mythic narratives are universal. By this, he means mythic themes and images are “drawn from the universal human experience” (p. 13). While the cultures of mythic characters may differ dramatically, the struggles and processes involved in overcoming hardships can be universalized into other

contexts with some effect. For instance, the myth of the weaker but more just individual beating the stronger but unjust foe takes life in both the David and Goliath narrative and the fictional account of the American boxer, Rocky Balboa, beating the medically and technologically enhanced Russian Ivan Drago in *Rocky IV*. In both instances, the point of the story is to highlight a universal cultural value—that good will triumph in the end.

Frequently myths are scrutinized as fictional stories lacking real world implications. While myths often involve fictional characters, it is not always so. Doty (2004) claims that “careful attention [to myths] reveals their contents touch less on fantasy than on everyday questioning of quite realistic developmental issues” (p. 3). With that in mind, this thesis demonstrates that myths function as cultural repositories of past historical events transmitted through generations for developing communities and teaching the values that structure and organize societies. Thus, the insistence that myths lack factual representation and realistic solutions to social problems is superseded by their effect in preserving the heuristics necessary for a society to learn from their past and instruct on more knowledgeable ways in approaching the present and future. As Wink (1971) reminds us; what societies believe to be true supersedes what, in ‘fact,’ actually happened (p. 7).

Even a cursory glance at the many retellings of the Crazy Horse story reveals that it clearly fits the parameters of a mythic narrative. Crazy horse has exceptional, even superhuman, warrior prowess and almost spiritual selflessness. He was, as noted above, believed to be immune from harm in battle, and his very life was lived for the good of the Sioux. In addition, because Crazy Horse was seen as the last significant military threat to U.S. expansionism, there is a temporal significance to his story. The only way for the Sioux and the U.S. to move beyond their war was through Crazy Horse’s death. And of course, the Sioux are often portrayed as the

David to the American Goliath. But perhaps less obvious for some is that the Crazy Horse myth takes place within a symbolic geography. However, in the Crazy Horse myth the frontier is most certainly the place of special power. All his life he was molded by the dangers and luxuries afforded by the frontier. In this way, his powers are seen to be drawn from the environment that shaped him. In this way, the dangers and struggles of the frontier imposed on settlers and military personnel are considered advantages for the Lakota warrior.

Indeed, in the American imagination, the frontier has been so significant that it now represents an entire subarea of research on myth in the United States. Since Frederick Jackson Turner's address before the American Historical Association in 1893, the frontier has come to symbolize many things in the American imagination. Wink (1971) asserts that Turner's address presented the notion that "the frontier was the central force in shaping the American character" (p. 9). The influence of Turner's thesis produced, within the body politic of America, the notion that the American frontier was a physical place, an idea, and a process by which America was "unique and democratic" (p. 9). This notion portrayed the frontier as a sort of proving ground for the American to justify his presence in a harsh physical environment. The American, if he was to survive, had to adapt to and subjugate the harsh environment characterized by the frontier and make it safe for others. In this way, the physical environment shaped the frontiersman into a tough, cunning individual capable of surviving harsh conditions and the potential rival of "savage" Indians. Moreover, Wink continues to tell us that the frontier allowed for a truly American democracy because unlike Britain, American land was "free" of inherited aristocracy (p. 10). In this way the frontier also became a unique opportunity for Americans "because there was so much land and because it was spread so broadly in terms of a thin population that virtually anyone who wished to possess realty could do so" (p. 10). In addition to providing an

alternative to aristocratic ownership of land, the frontier was thought to have unlimited resources by which democracy could flourish. Since “democracy rests upon affluence,” the frontier was portrayed as a “safety valve” for economic abundance because it was thought that there were more resources than the American public could ever use (p. 11).

While Turner’s Frontier Thesis certainly characterized the American Frontier as a major component in the shaping of American character, it also demonstrates the influence frontier themes had in the development of an American identity. Through frontier rhetoric, Americans came to view America as a frontier settled and conquered by heroic frontiersman who battled Indians and a harsh physical environment to justify their presence in a foreign land. Slotkin (1985) argued that the myth of the frontier is the “longest-lived” myth in America; spanning from the colonial period to a “continuing presence in contemporary culture” (p. 15). In many ways, the frontier has been viewed as a necessary component in the development of a unique American nation based upon democratic principles. The idea here is that the frontier led to the notion that Americans could achieve anything through hard work and perseverance. In addition, Turner’s thesis has come to represent the notion that because the “dangerous wilderness” and wild Indians had been tamed the frontier ceased to exist.

Considered a success because the American was capable of colonizing a dangerous environment and, for the most part, the American Indians who had ancestral claim to such lands; drawing upon frontier themes became “basic to political success” throughout the twentieth century (Wink, 1972, p. 13). That is, frontier experiences encompass the values and morals that are considered, collectively, as central to American progress (Wink, 1972). Since the American frontier had been conquered, Americans felt confident in their ability to set out and conquer other frontiers. Thus the mythic overtone of the frontier lies within the exceptional ability of

Americans to provide civilization and democracy in spaces otherwise unthinkable. One such example lies within American political rhetoric juxtaposing U.S. involvement in foreign combat throughout the twentieth century with frontier experiences fighting Indians.

Ronald Carpenter's (1995) book *History as Rhetoric: Style, Narrative, and Persuasion* is one such attempt at placing the frontier as a focus of American political rhetoric that links frontier experiences fighting Indians with subsequent U.S. involvement in foreign wars. Carpenter described the use of the frontier as a metaphorical "tenor vehicle interaction" evoking meaning that linked prior frontier experiences fighting Indians to other wars (p. 264). For Carpenter, this began in the Spanish-American War, continued through both world wars and was "seriously questioned during the Vietnam War" (ibid). With the reinforcement of American historians, the American public was confident in their ability to confront any new frontier because their heritage portrayed frontiersman as exceptional. As such, the "triumphs" of frontiersman provided examples of heroism which remained salient throughout the political rhetoric of leaders in both World Wars and the Cold War (p. 269). In this metaphorical extension of the frontier, westward expansion and pioneer struggles taught virtues for American soldiers to emulate. It also asked the American public to support military endeavors on "new frontiers" (p. 294). In effect, the re-emergence of the frontier myth "invoked powerful associations with an America of the past" and provided subsequent generations of Americans with a "symbolic key to interpreting the meaning of history" (Slotkin, 1985). The prevalence of the frontier theme in political rhetoric is not the only way in which the frontier has influenced American society.

Another example of how the frontier has re-emerged in American culture is in popular cultures' expression of westerns. Janice Rushing (1983) points out that the influence of westerns

in popular culture was re-emergent throughout the twentieth century and such expressions of the myth varied, depending on the “societal threats” at the time of its production (p. 15). The popularity of the western became “pervasive in film, television, radio, recordings, paperback books, and toys- as well as in such ‘real life’ arenas as fashion, dance, and politics” (p. 15). Slotkin (1985) argues that the resonance of the western frontier myth, over time, has become “one of the primary organizing principles of our historical memory” (p. 16). Popular culture has circulated the frontier myth in western themed stories that encompass certain worldviews and cultural values salient at the time of production. That is to say, the frontier myth contains “deeply encoded metaphors” that teach “us” lessons learned through history that are “essential elements of our world view” (Rushing, 1983, pp. 16-18).

Given that myths offer examples of exceptional people solving problems, the myth has been characterized by the heroic frontiersman who battles Indians for the sake of others while also enduring the hardships posed by the physical environment. Typically, the Western hero maintains a “rugged individualism” while also being responsive to the needs of a community (p. 16). In this way, the heroic “western” figure manages to exist outside of civilization while at the same time protecting civilization from the dangers of the natural world and the uncivilized Indian. The individual maintains his or her heroic status by being capable and willing to attend to the exigencies of a community. Moreover, the heroism is only present when it is needed. In other words, if a hero lacks sufficient challenges he or she becomes “tamed” thereby relinquishing the heroic status because it is not needed any longer (p. 17). This serves to explain the insistence of a new frontier in which Americans may exercise their heroic qualities.

While the majority of classic westerns depict heroes as white and civilization as the end goal to preserve and protect, as society’s needs fluctuate, the qualities and makeup of the hero

are subject to change. One such shift occurred during the unpopular view American society held on U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War. At this time, western films tapped into the mood of the sixties that civilization was the enemy and reached an audience “much more willing to sympathize with an outlaw than a sheriff” (Rushing, p. 21). Additionally, sixties westerns reversed the notion of Indians as the enemy and produced “a long list of Indian-as-hero movies” (ibid). In this way, the subversion of heroic qualities and their relationship to society demonstrates the dynamic nature of myth and its accessibility to respond to current societal conditions. Since these westerns were frequently consumed by youth it served as a guide for heroic values and shaped “visions of heroism” that often characterized the institutions produced by civilization as the enemy (p. 18). This is not to say that heroes lacked virtue in this transmutation of the frontier myth. Rather than preserving and fighting for the good of a particular society, the hero at this time exhibited the intuition to recognize injustice within a community. In this sense, the task of the hero is ultimately to save society from itself.

Given the importance of the frontier myth to the American imagination, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the Crazy Horse mythic narrative has received so much attention over the past century. In many ways, Crazy Horse and his extra-human military acumen represented the greatest threat to America’s frontier myth. That is, Crazy Horse’s leadership in the defeat of Custer and the U.S. military call into question the very ability for the Americans to tame the frontier. Indeed, the way in which the Crazy Horse threat was eventually dealt with in 1877 still complicates that narrative, which is possibly why so many biographers and historians, including the three I turn to now, have worked so hard to retell the myth of Crazy Horse.

Three Tellings of the Crazy Horse Myth

While it is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis to provide analysis of all the interpretations of Crazy Horse, this essay focuses on three very different interpretations of the Crazy Horse myth. In the following sections I divide my analysis in three parts; each text receiving its own analysis. For each section of analysis I will first focus on how each author constructs a different version of a mythic hero using Crazy Horse's story. Next I will demonstrate how the differences in each version provide a different sort of social critique of American society. I have chosen to read each text against one another as a means to highlight that the difference in each interpretation is a rhetorical choice by each author. As noted above, my argument is that because there are few, if any, primary sources in the life of Crazy Horse each author is capable of constructing Crazy Horse by emphasizing a particular form of heroism. Before going any farther, however, it is important to give a brief background of each author and provide a general overview of how each text differs in approach to the story of Crazy Horse.

Stephen Ambrose's *Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors*, as the title suggests, is a controversial juxtaposition of Crazy Horse and his military foe Custer. Ambrose's background in teaching and writing about military history provides interesting insights into the lives of each warrior. In addition to *Crazy Horse and Custer*, Ambrose has published biographical works on Eisenhower, Nixon, and various heroic military groups (e.g., *Band of Brothers*, *The Wild Blue*, etc.). In *Crazy Horse and Custer*, Ambrose uses "almost exclusively published sources" that portray each warrior as a product of the environment that shaped them (Bailey, book review). Published in 1975, the centennial year of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Ambrose addressed an audience eager to understand the events that led to one

of the most lopsided losses U.S. forces have ever seen. As such, Crazy Horse becomes a case study in the trauma wrought by an unjust war.

The author of the second book I analyze is Joseph Marshall, a Lakota descendent of Crazy Horse's people. Although Marshall is not directly related to Crazy Horse, his narrative privileges his cultural inclusivity as a member of the Lakota people. Marshall constructs Crazy Horse by drawing extensively on Lakota oral tradition and his lived experiences as a Lakota man. For Marshall, if readers wish to understand Crazy Horse they need to understand him from a Lakota's point of view. Marshall's credibility stems from his profession as a Lakota historian, travelling storyteller, and cultural preservationist for Sioux people. His "respectful use of oral history" is used to dramatic effect throughout the text to provide details about Crazy Horse that have been previously unavailable for cultural outsiders (Kirkus Reviews, 2004). While details about Crazy Horse remain ambiguous, Marshall's book has been considered an "as-accurate-as-the-record-allows" account of one of the more enigmatic figures in American history (Maksel, Book Review).

The final book I analyze is also the most recent attempt to provide an understanding to the life of Crazy Horse. Thomas Powers is a freelance writer and award winning investigative journalist. A Yale graduate, Powers has authored six works of non-fiction that focus primarily on intelligence in the CIA and other secretive U.S. institutions. As a journalist and writer, Powers has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting (1971), the Oliver Branch Award (1984) for a story on the Cold War, the Berlin Prize (2007), and most recently his book on Crazy Horse was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for History. In a New York Times book review of Power's *The Killing of Crazy Horse*, Evan Thomas (2010) argues that Power's "excessive recitation of the evidence" attributed to accounts of when Crazy Horse was killed

may cause some readers to get lost in details. Thomas goes on to say that although this “diminishes the urgency of the story” Powers remains “nonetheless, a great journalistic anthropologist” (“A Good Day to Die”). In *The Killing of Crazy Horse*, Powers avoids the early years of Crazy Horse saying that “many stories are told about the early life of Crazy Horse but few are completely firm” (p. 5). The avoidance of Crazy Horse’s “early years” allows Powers to focus more on the sequence of events that lead to his demise at Camp Robinson. In this way Powers has the advantage of a variety of sources that witnessed or at least were in general proximity of the incident. By truncating the story of Crazy Horse to the final years, Powers is able to explore and present, in great detail, nearly every possible reference to the killing of Crazy Horse at Camp Robinson.

Given the differences in the cultural and professional backgrounds of each of the three authors it makes sense that Crazy Horse would come to represent different things. As I have mentioned, because we know so little about Crazy Horse, each author is afforded a freedom to emphasize his heroism to meet their own ends. As such, Crazy Horse becomes a heroic figure with a different face in each text. To develop this point, my analysis ultimately reads each text against one another.

In a mythic narrative, a hero is an individual who possesses the mental fortitude and physical abilities necessary to endure and perform necessary heroic deeds in the face of overwhelming odds. To use Dorothy Norman’s phrase, heroes personify “the ability to survive both the symbolical night and winter through possessing the fortitude to confront their rigors” (Introduction, pp. 4-5). In other words, mythic heroes go beyond the exploits of ordinary people by facing the difficult challenges which most are ill-equipped to handle. This is what Rowland (1984) calls “the worthiness of the hero” which forces the individual to confront certain obstacles

and emerge victorious by solving a particular societal concern (p. 90). In order for a warrior to be heroic, he must possess the ability to vanquish a foe that presents a danger to the society that he is entitled to protect. Moreover the enemy of the heroic warrior must provide a sufficient challenge in which the warrior may display his prowess.

As I have mentioned previously, the lack of factual information regarding the life of Crazy Horse opens him up to a variety of interpretations. Because myths often tell stories of exceptional characters doing extraordinary deeds, mythic characters often reside in a fictional state outside of lived experience. For Crazy Horse, we know enough details about the man to confirm he existed in reality. However, because we know so little about who Crazy Horse was as a person, he is capable of filling certain heroic functions typically reserved for fictional characters. This is not to say that our authors are making up his story. Rather, readers confront a person of realistic historical relevance yet Crazy Horse remains larger than life. While Crazy Horse is portrayed as a hero in each biographical work, each author interprets his heroism in different ways and constructs the enigmatic warrior by focusing on certain characteristics that fit their interpretation of who Crazy Horse was and how he fits the character mold of a mythic hero. In this way, the absence of information regarding Crazy Horse allows the biographer to accentuate certain details about Crazy Horse while he stands in to symbolize different aspects of heroism. Few characters in American history have this potential. Because we know so little about Crazy Horse, he is capable of exemplifying different models of heroism where others may fall short. It also enables writers of historical figures to go beyond the conventions of historical writing in an attempt to generate a more qualitative understanding of the events of this particular time in American history.

Crazy Horse the Heroic Warrior

Of the three biographical works I examined, Stephen Ambrose's *Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors* best exemplifies the notion that Crazy Horse is afforded a heroic mythic status based upon his prowess as a warrior. From this angle, Stephen Ambrose, a cultural outsider to Crazy Horse and Lakotas, is able to speak from a position of authority due to his extensive empirical knowledge of military history. That is, readers may be incapable of knowing precisely what Crazy Horse was like as a person; yet, viewing him in the lens of a warrior archetype provides focus to an otherwise surreal character. While information on how Crazy Horse conducted himself on the field of battle is limited and relies on second and tertiary accounts, the evidence presented by Ambrose bolsters the notion that Crazy Horse was as powerful a warrior as this continent has ever seen. Because he was so effective in shocking enemies with daring theatrics and frequent displays of courage, Crazy Horse was effective in organizing Sioux warriors without giving orders or asking permission. Ambrose tells us that, in Sioux warfare, warriors followed who they wished into battle and were not bound to any leader or faction of the tribe. Crazy Horse inspired young warriors to fight by his side, Ambrose tells us, because they believed his "medicine was most powerful." That is to say, Crazy Horse was known to most Sioux for his ability to remain untouched by enemy fire while at the same time hitting all that he aimed at.

One example of how Ambrose casts Crazy Horse as the heroic warrior is through the warrior's willingness to put himself in danger to keep others safe. Ambrose provides a description of a skirmish in which Crazy Horse and his brother Little Hawk were outnumbered by their traditional enemies, the Shoshonis. According to Ambrose, the Shoshonis had encircled Crazy Horse and his brother preventing their escape all the while shouting insults and firing

arrows. With no choice but to improvise, Crazy Horse exhibits confidence in the face of adversity and, perhaps more importantly, is provided a unique situation in which to display his exceptional abilities in hand to hand combat. As Ambrose recounts the event:

As the two Shoshonis charged, Crazy Horse shouted to Little Hawk, "Take care of yourself- I'll do the fancy stunt." Stepping forward from his protected position, Crazy Horse stood directly in the path of the charging Shoshoni. When the man and pony were almost upon him, Crazy Horse, with his head and shoulders, feinted to his right. The Shoshoni took the fake and turned his horse in the direction he expected Crazy Horse to move. But at the last second Crazy Horse twisted to his left, grabbed the leg of the passing Shoshoni, and jerked him from the pony. The man hit the ground with a thud, knocked unconscious. Crazy Horse jumped on the Shoshoni pony, looked around, and discovered that Little Hawk had hit the other enemy with an arrow, unseating him from his pony. Little Hawk mounted up and the brothers dug in their heels and took off for the east, laughing gaily.

In Ambrose's story, Crazy Horse clearly exhibits incredible cunning and physical ability. He bests his adversaries with "fancy stunt" and the rides away "laughing gaily" at the defeated enemy. As the short anecdote presents it, Crazy Horse never felt fear.

Ambrose then explains that most Sioux believed Crazy Horse was capable of such deeds because he possessed a sacred stone that protected him from enemy fire. In this way, Crazy Horse's "medicine" was more powerful than any enemy. As such, Crazy Horse inspired young men to follow him in to battle while at the same time striking fear and utmost respect from enemies. Drawing upon an account of Red Feather, a companion to Crazy Horse, Ambrose explains that although Crazy Horse had "eight horses killed under him, he was never wounded by an enemy of the Oglalas" (p. 133). Because Ambrose is predominately focused with the performance of Crazy Horse at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the skirmish with Shoshoni enemies becomes a sort of proving ground through which readers catch a glimpse of the exceptional warrior qualities of Crazy Horse. That is to say, Ambrose constructs the Shoshoni

confrontation as preparation for the onslaught of U.S. forces that would be the ultimate test for a hero. Thus a hero is only heroic insofar as he is presented with a challenge that ordinary people cannot overcome. To use Rowland's (1984) phrase, "the more difficult the problem faced in a myth, the greater the hero must be" (p. 10). The Shoshoni adversary is, then, seen as an insignificant threat, but they nevertheless set up the later comparison to the U.S. military.

More so than any other biography in this analysis, Ambrose constructs Crazy Horse as a warrior imbued with divine characteristics that made him the ideal general even amongst a tribe whose warring capacity faced insurmountable odds. This is accomplished, as the title suggests, by juxtaposing Crazy Horse with Custer. Ambrose tells us that while the two men bare striking similarities, they, "like their societies, were as different as life and death." This is the theme around which Ambrose constructs each man—as products of their culture. Although each man stood out as exceptional within his respective culture, they were bound to the worldview and community in which they were socialized, which ultimately brought each man to their demise. While Crazy Horse and Custer are not the only characters in Ambrose's work, they are the reference points for which readers may understand the cultures that developed two of America's greatest warriors. Ambrose develops this narrative by tracing the upbringing of each man. While information about Crazy Horse is scant, Ambrose draws readers into what seems to be a typical socialization process for a Sioux boy maturing in a rapidly changing environment where the presence of white men grew from a troublesome nuisance to a severe threat of total annihilation. Ambrose then compares and contrasts Custer's upbringing which is, as one would expect, more documented than the Lakota boy. In a chapter titled "Custer and Crazy Horse on the Eve of Manhood," Ambrose begins by establishing common ground between the two seemingly antithetical characters:

Each boy was carefully taught by his society the skills necessary to survival, and each learned what was expected of him with regard to his behavior and belief. Neither boy came from a prominent family, but by the time they were in their late teens both Crazy Horse and Custer stood out in their societies as individuals of unusual daring, drive, and initiative. Both red and white societies were sufficiently practical and realistic to recognize these valuable traits despite the boys' modest backgrounds.

Ambrose continues to explain that each boy's ascendance to manhood was a rigorous process of self development in a system that heavily influenced the expression of their seemingly similar personality traits. Ambrose then suggests that while each boy made a name for himself within his community, each learned very different characteristics of leadership that separated the two. At this juncture the two seemingly similar boys became men that could be contrasted as night and day. While the tribal upbringing and socialization enabled Crazy Horse to live a "free" lifestyle, Custer is portrayed as heavily constrained by the strict discipline of a "white" world. Ambrose interprets the narrative of Custer as an individual motivated by self advancement in what appears to be a grooming process for an appointment at the White House. In other words, Ambrose constructs Custer as illustrative of the imperialistic culture of American society at the time. In this way, Custer is portrayed as what Joseph Campbell calls the mythic "tyrant" whose pride ultimately leads to his demise (p. 337). On the other hand, Ambrose constructs Crazy Horse as holding the high moral ground because his warrior prowess was utilized to protect his people. Whereas Ambrose constructs Custer as a warrior motivated by the American ideal of individual progress that characterized the time, Crazy Horse seeks no individual gain. As Ambrose states this point,

The ultimate difference between the two men was their mood. Custer was never satisfied with where he was. He always aimed to go on to the next higher station in his society. He was always in a state of *becoming*. Crazy Horse accepted the situations he found himself in and aimed only to be a brave and respected Sioux warrior, which by the time

he was a young adult he had been, was then, and would be. He was in a state of *being*. Custer believed that things could be better than they were. Crazy Horse did not. (p. 125)

For Ambrose the difference is most certainly tied to culture. That is to say, Ambrose constructs both men as heroic warriors that were responding to the needs of their very different cultures. By providing this sort of critique, Ambrose is reflecting on the values of each culture which ultimately influenced the mood of each warrior. While Custer is considered just as an exceptional a warrior as Crazy Horse, he is drawn into the role of the tyrant because he is meant to symbolize the culture of imperialism fostered by American society at the time. In the frontier myth, Slotkin (1985) tells us that the Indian wars have come to symbolize the notion that “when two races occupy the same space the weaker must be subjugated or exterminated (p. 477). This survival of the fittest motif has been incorporated in American politics for well over a century and has guided policies on land annexation and the culmination of America as a global superpower. However, Ambrose’s contrast of Crazy Horse and Custer helps to explain why we continue to honor Crazy Horse for his heroic deeds while Custer is remembered for the circumstances of his death, his last stand, at the Little Bighorn.

All of the aforementioned comparison and contrast of Crazy Horse and Custer is preliminary to the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Indeed this particular conflict is the event around which Ambrose focuses his book. Ambrose tells us that U.S. military forces were being pushed hard in their campaign to subjugate the Sioux in order to open western lands for settlement and resource extraction. In turn, “hostile” Sioux were proving elusive and dangerous. Ambrose provides a startling statistic that the campaign cost U.S. taxpayers “about \$1,000,000 for each Indian killed.” Moreover, the American government needed to maintain the posterity of a powerful nation while at the same time balancing the moral decree of an exceptional people on a

global stage. This conundrum was best resolved if done so swiftly and with an iron fist.

Ambrose makes the case that Custer had the impetus for such responsibility. In this way, Ambrose constructs Custer as an unstoppable force; Crazy Horse becomes the immovable object.

The Battle at Little Bighorn has received a great amount of attention in historical works. We know that Crazy Horse and Custer were involved and that Custer and his men were destroyed in what remains one of the worst defeats in U.S. military history. Yet we lack the empirical certainty to provide a detailed understanding of what exactly occurred on that violent day. Therefore, there are several myths that have culminated from this particular event. Slotkin (1985) has argued that the “Last Stand myth,” in which Custer is metaphorically the last man standing, evokes the notion in American history that “progress is achieved through regenerative wars of extermination against a primitive racial enemy” (p. 477). For Ambrose, however, the Battle at the Little Bighorn is an exemplary case of the dangers associated with the pursuit of progress.

In order to set the scene, Ambrose envisions the terrain of the Little Bighorn by providing geographic details that he knows because he has been to the location of the fight. Ambrose’s use of vivid details draw readers into a scene of the little bighorn telling us it is a stream that even in late June “is a pleasure to drink.” After Ambrose has situated the setting based upon what he knows, he begins to construct, through imagination, the Sioux encampment. According to the historical record, this particular gathering of Sioux was one of the largest in history. Ambrose describes the Sioux encampment as jubilant and without any fear of U.S. forces. All the while young Sioux men argued they should be allowed to fight and prove themselves as warriors. Ambrose then tells us that the Sioux were eager for the conflict and were sitting around preparing for battle, resting and “wondering when the soldiers would come.” On the other hand,

Ambrose tells us that while the Sioux were resting, Custer and his men were wary from their pursuit of the encampment. Ambrose explains that Custer, eager to prove himself as the quintessential Indian fighter, had pushed the 7th Cavalry to a point of exhaustion for fear that the Sioux encampment would disperse. According to Ambrose, when Custer realized the Sioux were at the Little Bighorn his mission was not only to whip the 'hostile' Sioux but also win the glory in his name without the aid of other U.S. forces assigned to the Sioux campaign. Without hesitation, Custer charged in and the battle began.

At this point in Ambrose's mythic narrative, readers encounter a Crazy Horse much different than the man who fought the Shoshoni with such courage and tenacity. Prior to the Battle at the Little Bighorn, Ambrose has interpreted Crazy Horse as a warrior who would ride out eager to confront any enemy. However, as the U.S. military presented a more difficult challenge than the Shoshoni conflict described above, Crazy Horse had to alter his approach.

Ambrose tells us that Crazy Horse must have seen more at stake in the fight than getting there first. In this scene Ambrose provides quotations of alleged statements by both Crazy Horse and Custer. Ambrose tells us that Short Bull, a companion to Crazy Horse, mocked him for missing the initial fight, to which Crazy Horse responded by laughing and saying "Sorry to miss this fight...But there's a good fight coming over the hill. That's where the big fight is going to be." Crazy Horse was referring to Custer and his 225 officers who were attempting to flank the Sioux who were fighting the bulk of Custer's forces. In this way, Ambrose constructs Crazy Horse as the prescient warrior who realized that something much larger was at stake in this particular battle than displaying courage. On the other hand, Custer appears foolhardy and caught in the anxiousness of the moment. Ambrose tells us that Custer looked down on the encampment which appeared to be conducting normal everyday chores and said "We've caught

them napping... We've got them!" In an ironic twist to Custer's words, Ambrose tells us that the Sioux were well rested and more ready for an attack than Custer and his troops who had spent the days prior marching and riding their horses to near death from exhaustion. In this way, Custer is clearly portrayed as the tyrant, which Campbell (1949) tells us is "destin[ed] to be tricked" (p. 337).

As this scene unfolds, Ambrose makes the argument that the Battle of the Little Bighorn was won by the outstanding generalship of Crazy Horse. In most accounts, exploits of the battle are attributed to Custer's arrogant ambition to attack a far superior force. However, Ambrose claims that it was Crazy Horse's brain and not his "usual reckless bravery" that won the day, as he led a large force of Indians in outflanking Custer:

For the first time in his life, Crazy Horse's presence was decisive on the battlefield not because of his courage, but because of his brain. But one fed on the other. His outstanding generalship had brought him at the head of a ferocious body of warriors to the critical point at the critical moment. Then with his courage he took advantage of the situation to sweep down on Custer and stamp his name, and that of Custer, indelibly on the pages of the nation's history. (p. 446)

According to Ambrose, it is this decisive moment in the battle that ultimately makes Crazy Horse a historical, and mythical, hero in the American imagination.

Because we can never be sure of what occurred during the battle, Ambrose's interpretation of the event is in many ways just as accurate as any other interpretation. The juxtaposition of Custer and Crazy Horse offers readers a fascinating paradigm of two individuals that both stood out in their societies while also performing as cultural symbols of each way of life. For Ambrose, one should remember Crazy Horse for his exceptional warrior qualities. By contrast, one should remember that Custer's weakness was his impetus for personal advancement. Here we see Crazy Horse as Custer's polar opposite because he was a man that

did not take anything for himself. Ambrose argues that although he can never be sure of the exact details of what occurred: “The conclusion is inescapable. At the Little Big Horn, Custer was not only outnumbered; he was also outgeneraled.” (p. 447).

Since Ambrose is focused on interpreting dual characters within a myth his narrative is fascinating and original. Certainly, Ambrose interprets both Crazy Horse and Custer as heroic individuals in his narrative. In this way Ambrose constructs each hero in terms of what their very different societal needs were at the time. For Ambrose, Custer needed to be annihilated because it culminated in a peak of public support to clear the Sioux of their lands and open the remaining western lands for settlement. In this way, Ambrose portrays Custer as a necessary sacrifice in order for America to achieve its destiny. However, there is also a sense of caution in Ambrose’s narrative that the American notion of progress runs the risk of darkening the image of America. That is to say, America is seen more as an imperial power than a beacon of democratic governance. On the other hand, Ambrose interprets Crazy Horse as heroic because his intransigent will to protect his people and their way of life is what they needed most in the face of forced assimilation into the American scene.

While Ambrose interprets Custer and Crazy Horse as both having heroic qualities, his narrative evokes an image of Crazy Horse that supersedes the heroism of Custer. In this way, Crazy Horse is heroic first and foremost because he won the day at the Little Bighorn. Moreover, Ambrose’s narrative illustrates that Crazy Horse was heroic because he fought for a cause greater than himself devoid of political agenda and the propaganda confronting most Americans. Thus, Ambrose’s narrative constructs Crazy Horse as the ideal warrior because that was the cultural function to which he aspired, while Custer is depicted as never satisfied with his role as a warrior, which was little more than a means to another end.

To interpret Crazy Horse in this way provides a critique of American society writ large. The idea here is that, too often, Americans rush in to situations predicated on a fundamental concept in American culture: progress. Because Ambrose compares and contrasts Crazy Horse and Custer, culture becomes the force that pushes everything in to motion. Interpreting Crazy Horse this way attempts to teach readers that to be exceptional has little to do with progress and achieving advancement for one's self. Rather, Crazy Horse's heroism entails the ability to confront injustice for the greater good of one's community.

Crazy Horse the Heroic Lakota

William Doty (2004) tells us that myths are "deep stories" that serve to "reflect the human tendency to organize its representation of the past, present, and future according to specific emphases and moral highlights" (p. 13). Because myths are most often told to help a society overcome a social concern, the individual telling the myth will typically highlight certain details of the story in order to best serve their community. That is, myths are dynamic representations of past events organized into a narrative meant to serve current and future social situations. The importance of myths is not necessarily their historical accuracy or proximity to reality. Rather, myths continue to provide important cultural functions because they suggest to audiences that a particular value system should be maintained or sought out. Moreover, at the core of a myth is a heroic individual triumphing over hardship thereby providing an example for others to emulate. As such, the individual interpreting the hero may choose to highlight different characteristics of heroism in order to achieve his or her purpose. Because Crazy Horse is such a polysemic character, he has the potential to embody a wide range of heroic characteristics.

In 1937, historian George Hyde wrote that Crazy Horse's contemporaries portrayed him as "a kind of Sioux Christ" (quoted in Haines, p. 55). While we know very little about what

Crazy Horse was like as a person, the impression he left upon his contemporaries has become the symbol for subsequent generations of Sioux people to evaluate their cultural identities as members of a distinct nation. That is, in the same way that Christians attempt to be like Christ, members of the Sioux tribe hold Crazy Horse as the prototype for Sioux values and cultural mores. While Sioux people hold Crazy Horse as the standard of what it means to be Lakota, cultural outsiders have also come to view him as the symbol of a *real* Indian. In this way, Crazy Horse is drawn into a political struggle for the perception contemporary society holds about American Indians. It would seem that a Lakota's perspective of Crazy Horse is not only warranted, it is crucial in understanding the man behind the legend.

Of the three biographers I examined, Joseph Marshall III is perhaps the most qualified to write about the life of Crazy Horse. Marshall is a member of the Sioux nation and his first language is Lakota. Marshall's cultural background certainly plays a role in his professional career as a historian, educator, and storyteller. Marshall has written several works about Lakota history told from an American Indian point of view that attempt to revise the historical narrative of frontier experiences. *The Journey of Crazy Horse: A Lakota History* (2004) is the first and only full length biographical work on Crazy Horse written by a member of the Sioux tribe. Marshall wastes very little time privileging his cultural authority over non-Native interpretations of Crazy Horse. Marshall tells us that the "non-Lakota world" too often focuses on Crazy Horse's exploits in battle and misses the real reason why he is a hero to Lakota (Introduction, xix). Thus, *The Journey of Crazy Horse* is a biographic narrative aimed at reclaiming Crazy Horse as a Lakota hero by reconstructing his image from a fierce warrior to a man whose generosity kept his people alive in a time of traumatic change. However, that is not to say that Marshall does not interpret Crazy Horse as an exceptional warrior. Such details are too prevalent

in the story of Crazy Horse to omit. Rather, what Marshall does is shift the emphasis from the warrior aspect of Crazy Horse to highlight the ways in which Crazy Horse functions as an ideal character mold for traditional Sioux values.

As I have mentioned, Marshall has considerable clout in constructing his narrative about the life of Crazy Horse. Doty (2004) tells us that because myths are “collected products” passed down from one generation to the next “we must consider who is telling the myth and whose diction is allowed to be heard” (p. 14). Marshall explains that while Crazy Horse was born in the 1840’s and he was born in 1945 they are not so different. Although the two men are separated by a century, Marshall assures readers that “enough of Lakota culture has survived...to allow my generation to identify strongly with his” (p. 47). Therefore, each section of Marshall’s book ends with a brief essay titled “reflections” in which Marshall draws comparisons between himself and Crazy Horse based upon their socialization in a traditional Sioux way of living. Marshall explains that while “the village itself...has changed” since the time Crazy Horse lived, traditional families like that of Marshalls’ have preserved many of the customs and traditional beliefs which Crazy Horse exemplified and died to protect.

While other authors telling the story of Crazy Horse go to great lengths to provide citations and documentation to appear credible, Marshall does not. The absence of citations and references to government and written historical records is purposive. In turn, Marshall makes the argument that many of the misconceptions of what Crazy Horse was like have been fostered by non-Lakota writer’s reliance on published resources. Marshall tells us that because oral history is often considered a less credible source to non-Lakota a great deal of information regarding Crazy Horse has either been denied to outsiders or not sought out. As such, Marshall develops his narrative through his extensive experiences listening to oral tradition of elders telling stories

about Crazy Horse. For Marshall, their knowledge of tribal infrastructure and command of inclusive information about Crazy Horse should be placed before all other sources. Marshall explains that his book “is more their work than mine” (introduction, xviii).

Perhaps the most prevalent theme in Marshall’s narrative is his effort to voice dissatisfaction with interpretations of Crazy Horse by cultural outsiders. One way Marshall attempts to reclaim the image of Crazy Horse is by claiming that such interpretations function as an extension of ethnocentric bias generated from “white” historians. Marshall’s concern is that because Crazy Horse is most often portrayed as the prototypical Indian, the way he is perceived has a domino effect in society’s perception of contemporary American Indians. Marshall terms such interpretations as “Crazy Horses of conjecture” (p. 281). Marshall’s contention is voiced with a serious tone. However, he mocks non-Lakota interpretations of Crazy Horse in biographical works, popular films and the cultural industry to a point of comedic interaction with readers. For instance, Marshall references Stephen Ambrose’s work questioning his portrayal of Crazy Horse as an American: “If Crazy Horse is an American, then Joe McCarthy is a friend to Communism, Ralph Nader loves Chevrolet Corvairs, and Kenneth Lay is the champion of the working class” (p. 282). Marshall continues by arguing that those who hold Crazy Horse as the quintessential noble savage have such a limited and distorted view that they think “war bonnets are standard issue for all Indian males over the age of twelve” (p. 280). In this way, Marshall makes the argument that the image that Crazy Horse was a violent savage gives non-Indians a false sense of what American Indians were like in the past and, more importantly, what they are like today.

Because *The Journey of Crazy Horse* is told from a Lakota point of view, Marshall constructs his narrative about Crazy Horse with a confidence unrivaled by any other

interpretation. Marshall accomplishes this persona by digging deep into Lakota oral tradition to project an alternative view to Ambrose's "American" warrior. Although Crazy Horse maintains heroic stature as an exceptional warrior, this particular biographical work issues a "reticent treatment" of the battles which many attribute to the fame of Crazy Horse (Kirkus Reviews, 2004). For Marshall, Crazy Horse is heroic for his intransigent will to sustain Sioux culture in a time of forced assimilation. Although Marshall does not claim to have the complete portrait of Crazy Horse, he does make the argument that in order to understand Crazy Horse readers must submit to the authority of a cultural insider. From this perspective, Marshall becomes a sort of middle man between readers and the elders which shaped his vision of the man:

It is highly unlikely that another Lakota writer would approach the topic of Crazy Horse differently than I have. Nonetheless, a Lakota viewpoint about Crazy Horse needs to be put in front of those who have only a narrow view. Crazy Horse is much too important for the Lakota for us to be indifferent to the misconceptions about him. My Crazy Horse long ago ceased to be a one-dimensional hero impervious to the foibles of being human. I have done my best to make him real. I accept him for what he was as a man- as a Lakota person shaped by his environment. (#####)

At first it would seem that Marshall's narrative attempts to place Crazy Horse outside the parameters of a myth. That is, by making him "real" is to make him less than larger than life. However, Marshall interprets Crazy Horse as a hero which, by definition, is an individual that exceeds a discernible reality.

The Journey of Crazy Horse is certainly an attempt to reclaim control of the narrative of Crazy Horse. Marshall's contention is that prior biographical works focus on Crazy Horse the warrior and thus have a limited view of a man whose value to his people supersedes his courage and tenacity in war. As I mentioned previously, Marshall utilizes his cultural privilege to construct Crazy Horse using information passed down through oral tradition and his experiences

growing up in a traditional Lakota home. As a cultural insider, Marshall has access to information other researchers and historians do not. In this way, Marshall has the credibility to speak about Crazy Horse with an intimate connection. By shifting the focus from Crazy Horse's exploits in war, Marshall constructs a man that is heroic for his generosity to his people and his courage to remain loyal to the traditional way of living for Sioux in a time of traumatic change.

One example of such heroism is presented at the beginning of the book. Marshall briefly describes a scene in which the harsh winter of the Great Plains made hunting difficult and game scarce. Crazy Horse appears alongside his brother, Little Hawk, hiding from the storm when they happen to come across several elk. The two young men, roughly around the age of twenty, wait out the storm then bring down the elk. Marshall then tells us that the two young men saved the meat and brought it home and "saved their relatives and friends from starvation"

(Introduction, xi). In this way, readers see a generous Crazy Horse whose ability to provide meat is overlooked in historical accounts but was a vital component in the livelihood of his people.

Within a few years of this event, however, the harshness of winter would not be the only obstacle in finding game. Marshall explains that the presence of "whites" culminated in the destruction of the most plentiful resource in Sioux culture: the buffalo. Marshall tells us that the absence of buffalo were a sign for most Lakota that the American way of living would destroy anything that did not submit to the presence of civilization.

Undeniably, the whites were like the two-faced giant in the childhood stories the grandmothers told during the long winter nights. With an endless hunger, the giant ate anything and everything and trampled the land as he did, smashing all that lay in its path. The more it ate the larger it grew until it could leap across lakes and shake the Earth when it ran. For Crazy Horse, the giant was real. It had eaten all the buffalo... Life was always changing, after all. But this was different.

While myths typically involve fictional monsters as the foe a hero must defeat, Marshall draws upon that metaphoric connection to vilify the American culture. As such, Crazy Horse is interpreted as having the foresight to make such a connection. For Marshall, there is a sense of inevitability in this particular passage. That is to say, even an exceptional warrior would not be capable of slaying a giant such as Marshall describes in this particular passage. However, readers come to see the imperialistic nature of the American culture at this time. By claiming that “whites” were the destructive force is to place an emphasis on culture and not a military presence. For Marshall, it was not the U.S. military that had an insatiable hunger. Rather it was the presence of a foreign culture that, according to Marshall, would consume all that the Lakota cherish.

With the presence of this consuming culture, the Sioux were left in a state of shock both culturally and physically. As such, this period of unprecedented change for Lakota brought forth a schism within Crazy Horse’s community. Those who sought refuge at U.S. agencies were recipients of government issued commodities, yet they were denied their traditional free roaming way of life along with the freedom to practice their traditional customs and ceremonies. Marshall tells us that while Crazy Horse remained loyal to traditional Sioux custom, more and more of his people were relinquishing their culture for “the easy life” at government agencies (p. 174). At this point in Marshall’s narrative readers get the sense that Crazy Horse held an onus that went beyond the responsibilities of a warrior. Marshall tells us that Crazy Horse became more reclusive at this time, feeling responsible for searching for answers to help save his people from the “giant” at his doorstep. In the following description, Marshall provides readers with a scene that describes the hardships encountered by Sioux who remained loyal to the traditional way of life, those who, along with Crazy Horse, did not seek refuge at the government agencies:

Winter slid into the Moon of the Hard Times and it was a struggle just to find fresh meat. Hunters stalked rabbits as diligently as they did the elk. There was a feeling in the encampment, an unspoken one, weighed down with sadness and even more uncertainty. The old ones would walk to the crest of the hill on a windless day and stand, simply staring out over the land. Black Shawl [wife of Crazy Horse] was alone much of the time. She would find a hindquarter of elk or deer at the door of her lodge some mornings, or sometimes rabbits. She knew her husband was not far away, simply far enough so he could reach for answers amid the solitude he cherished (p. 243)

Here we see the myth of Crazy Horse interpreted in what Dorothy Norman calls a “life-enhancing manner” (1990, p. 4). As I have mentioned previously, biographic interpretations most generally refer to Crazy Horse as a heroic individual because of his exceptional warrior abilities. Marshall, however, constructs Crazy Horse as a hero by highlighting his ability to provide for members of his community that otherwise would have starved. In this way we see a reversal of the image of Crazy Horse. That is, by interpreting Crazy Horse as a provider of meat for his family he becomes a sustainer of life. By contrast, when Crazy Horse is interpreted as a warrior, his heroism entails the motive to take life. In addition, Marshall’s notion that Crazy Horse sought for answers that would help his community while in solitude functions as one of the primary characteristics of a western hero. To use Janice Rushing’s (1983) notion, the western hero “must manifest rugged individualism” while at the same time “if he does not respond to the needs of the community, typically to be saved by outside or inside evil forces, he cannot meet the goodness requirements of a hero” (p. 16).

For Marshall, Crazy Horse is the symbol for which many Sioux have kept their traditions alive. Crazy Horse is heroic not only for his courage on the field of battle but more importantly for his courage to sustain a way of life that was rapidly changing and being cast aside even amongst his community. Marshall explains how this heroism has impacted his life by referencing the assimilation attempts to extinguish Sioux identity and the efforts of traditionalists

to keep Sioux customs and culture alive. Marshall tells us that “in spite of the extensive efforts of the government and parochial boarding schools, there is still a Lakota language, still a Lakota identity” (pp. 53-54). Marshall then explains that this would not have been possible without the example set by Crazy Horse to have the courage to resist assimilation.

The fact that Marshall lives today and still practices many of the Sioux customs Crazy Horse fought to protect is in direct contention with the dominant perception of the death of Crazy Horse. Because Crazy Horse is considered the last formidable military threat to U.S. expansionism, his death is often associated with the demise of traditional Sioux culture. Haines (2002) tells us that due to the absence of Crazy Horse the government was able to force the remaining bands of Sioux onto reservations and “the entire culture of the American Indian was nearly extinguished, thanks to the Army’s policy of annihilation” (p. 58). In this way, the fascination non-Indians have with Crazy Horse the warrior is linked to the notion that without his display of exceptional warrior qualities the *real* Indians ceased to exist because they were tamed. However, Marshall is capable of demonstrating to readers how he is living proof that what Crazy Horse fought and died to protect was not annihilated by any government policy.

In summary, Marshall’s narrative of Crazy Horse attempts to reconstruct the warrior through an act of reclamation. Marshall posits Crazy Horse as a Lakota hero long before his exploits in battle made him a hero in the western sense of the term. In this way, readers are asked to view Crazy Horse as a powerful leader within Lakota tribal infrastructure. He becomes the symbol by which Lakota evaluate their identities as Sioux people. In addition, Marshall makes the argument that interpretations of Crazy Horse by cultural outsiders maintain an “ethnocentric bias” and “sensationalist pronouncements” that all Sioux men were, and are, war like (p. 269). Marshall argues that these accounts obscure the reality that a warrior’s duty is

“serving one’s community and nation” (p. 269). Of the three biographical works I analyze, Marshall’s is the most assertive and subjective interpretation of the story of Crazy Horse. More so than any other author, Marshall approaches the enigmatic Crazy Horse with a level of assurance that exceeds all other accounts.

It is a difficult task to claim that a particular interpretation of a biographic character holds precedence over others. Yet, the focus of this thesis is to determine how, and to what ends, Crazy Horse is portrayed as a mythic hero. Certainly Marshall interprets Crazy Horse as heroic and his particular cultural insight provides evidence that Crazy Horse has been a heroic figure in Sioux oral tradition since he was alive. In Marshall’s interpretation, Crazy Horse is constructed as the hero whose courage to remain loyal to the traditional Sioux way of life continues to instruct contemporary Sioux on how to maintain a separate cultural existence despite being encapsulated by American culture. By highlighting the generosity of Crazy Horse and aligning that particular value to traditional Sioux culture is a way of saying that such generosity is not a characteristic in the American value system. In this way, Marshall makes the argument to readers that Crazy Horse is the standard to which all, not just Lakota, should hope to achieve.

To interpret Crazy Horse in this way is an attempt to emphasize that to be heroic does not necessarily entail the ability to vanquish every foe. Rather, the heroism of Crazy Horse was his ability to place others before himself. This interpretation may hardly seem as heroic as the warrior dashing in front of enemy bullets and remaining untouched. However, when considering the culture of capitalism in America at the time, Crazy Horse appears again as a hero because he did not accept the idea that personal gain may be achieved at the expense of others. In addition, Marshall’s interpretation of Crazy Horse provides a criticism of the ethnocentrism present in the attempts of cultural outsiders to place historical significance on Crazy Horse. The idea here is

that Crazy Horse is interpreted as heroic for the wrong reasons. That is, to honor his exploits in battle is self-serving. For Marshall, Crazy Horse always thought of others and his exploits in battle, heroic as they may have been, were in service of his people and not himself.

While Marshall's narrative provides an insider point of view on Crazy Horse, what is hardly mentioned is the death of Crazy Horse. A controversial point in Sioux history, Crazy Horse is said to have been held down by his own tribesman and killed at Camp Robinson. In the following section, I will analyze the most recent biographical work on Crazy Horse that explores, in daunting detail, the death of Crazy Horse.

Crazy Horse the Heroic Martyr

Robert Segal (2004) tells us that the mythic hero "risks everything for whatever he has committed himself to" (pp. 111-112). In this sense, heroism entails a sort of dedication that supersedes all other individuals involved in the story. To think of heroism in this way does not necessarily focus on the physical aspects of a particular hero. Rather, in this context a hero must possess the mental fortitude to remain as a fixed point when all other individuals in the story have either compromised or abandoned the struggle. To use Dorothy Norman's (1990) phrase, "the hero of myth must abandon all and be abandoned" (p. 6). Put differently, a mythic hero must be capable of confronting an evil force alone because others do not possess the quality to face such a struggle. From this angle, Crazy Horse's surrender, and subsequent death, has the potential to be interpreted as heroic because it was a sacrifice others were unwilling to make.

To this point, the reader has seen the heroism of Crazy Horse emphasized in two very different ways. For Stephen Ambrose, Crazy Horse was heroic for his exceptional warrior qualities, which ultimately were the deciding factor at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. In turn, Joseph Marshall places emphasis on Crazy Horse's generosity to his people in a time when

forced assimilation left few with the courage to sustain the traditional Sioux way of life. Despite these different interpretations there is an inevitability that Crazy Horse has to die in the end. In many ways, the death of Crazy Horse is as ambiguous an event as many of the lesser recorded events of his life. Both Ambrose and Marshall provide some narrative details about the demise of Crazy Horse. However, no other biographer devotes as much attention to the events that lead to the death of Crazy Horse as Thomas Powers. In his narrative, Powers finds Crazy Horse heroic because he was willing to sacrifice himself in order for a new order to take place on the frontier.

While Stephen Ambrose and Joseph Marshall do not shy away from presenting a particular perspective of how we should understand Crazy Horse, Powers goes to considerable lengths to mask his subjectivity. No stranger to objective reporting, Powers is most noted for his work as an investigative journalist. Powers most notable achievement was when he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting in 1971. He has since written several books investigating secretive U.S. organizations. For his work on Crazy Horse, Powers was awarded the 2010 Los Angeles Book Prize for History. It would hardly seem prudent for an investigative reporter to author a book about a deceased American Indian. However, when one takes into account that for nearly a century Americans have grappled with a clear understanding of what Crazy Horse represents, an investigative reporter would seem to have necessary training to uncover information without projecting a particular perspective of who Crazy Horse was as a person. Moreover, there is the notion that the relationship between Americans and American Indians is essential to the nation's image.

Because biographic representations of Crazy Horse are cloaked in an aura of ambiguity, Powers begins by explaining his rationale for writing about the famous Lakota. In his

introduction, Powers explains that his decision to write about Crazy Horse culminated from a transcript he found from Billy Garnett, a half Sioux interpreter, who was present on the day Crazy Horse was killed by a soldier's bayonet. Powers tells us that Garnett's account "made it seem so unnecessary," yet Garnett knowing the "ins and outs of the whole complex story" did not seem to have formulated an opinion on the event (introduction, xi). Powers then explains that the document brought back childhood memories of playing cowboys and Indians and how he preferred the mysterious role of Indians over the "dull" role of cowboy (introduction, xii). Powers then explains that this childhood sympathy with the plight of American Indians led him to a host of literature that described such conflicts. By the age of fourteen, Powers claims to have realized "the treatment of Indians was something people did not like to describe plainly" (introduction, xii). For Powers, the history of American Indians is rife with stories of tragedy and death but the "killing" of Crazy Horse "retains its power to shock" (introduction, xi).

While much of the biographical attention to Crazy Horse focuses on battles, Powers focuses on the events after fighting ceased. From this perspective, Crazy Horse appears to readers as a peaceful man trying to look out for the best interest of his people. This emphasis differs dramatically from the heroism lauded by Stephen Ambrose. In this sense it may seem that Powers interprets Crazy Horse in a way similar to Joseph Marshall. However, there is a considerable difference. Perhaps the most substantial difference is their method. As I have explained, Marshall's access to Lakota oral tradition enables him to construct Crazy Horse in ways that outsiders cannot. That is to say, Marshall's cultural insight allows for a more intimate portrayal into the mind of a hero. In contrast, Powers draws extensively on written documentation to privilege his interpretation over others. In this way, readers get the sense that

Powers' interpretation is bound to the historical record and not his personal opinion. In the following passage Powers explains his approach:

The sources employed in telling this story come mainly from documents, such as diaries, letters, official reports, books, newspaper articles, notes jotted down by participants, and the like. In a few cases the sources are objects or drawings. The reader may feel confident that every factual claim in the telling of the story, unless openly identified as speculation, has some identifiable source. If the weather is described as hot, or if a character is said to have thought this or feared that, or a scene is described as dusty, or it is claimed that an Indian drawing on a pipe made an audible puffing sound, then there is some reason for believing so, and in almost all cases the source is cited in an endnote. Some readers may find the number of notes irritating, but others would hardly feel able to go on if left to wonder in frustration what (if anything) stood behind a new and unfamiliar fact. The challenge in writing true narrative is to offer two pleasures to the reader more or less simultaneously- the urgency of the story (which is why we tell or read it), and the richness of the evidentiary record (there when you need it).

The absence of Sioux oral tradition does not mean that Powers has attempted to extinguish the Lakota perspective of what occurred in the events that culminated in the death of Crazy Horse. It would hardly seem appropriate for a cultural outsider to approach this narrative in a way similar to Joseph Marshall. Because Powers is presenting "new material" in his narrative, it is crucial to back up what he says with historical accuracy because he lacks the authority to do otherwise. It also would run the risk of losing his posterity as an objective journalist.

While *The Killing of Crazy Horse* inundates readers with a variety of perspectives of why and how Crazy Horse was brought to death, Powers traces the evidence to find that, as one might expect, money was the motive. Powers explains that at the time of Crazy Horse's death the majority of Sioux had been persuaded to relinquish the traditional Sioux way of living, whether by military force or the promise of rations. As such, the remaining "hostiles" under the leadership of Crazy Horse were not in a position to present a significant military threat. The U.S. government's plan was to bring Crazy Horse in to the agency as expeditiously as possible

without fomenting further conflict. Powers tells us that the plan was “entirely practical” and called for the fighting to stop. Crazy Horse and his dwindling crew of remaining warriors “had to be got out of the way” (p. 370). When rumors spread that the very presence of Crazy Horse at the agency would cause problems, the plan was to place Crazy Horse under arrest and have him transported to Florida. That is, once he gave himself up. At this time, Powers portrays Crazy Horse as isolated from his people because most had retreated to the agencies under the notion that further resistance would result in total annihilation.

While Crazy Horse is often portrayed by cultural outsiders as a violent warrior with an intransigent devotion to resisting westward expansion in favor of the free roaming life traditional Lakota cherished, Powers provides readers with an in depth perspective that this notion is sorely misunderstood. Readers come to see Crazy Horse in a position where he desired peace to a point that he put himself at the mercy of trusting the same people who had conspired to kill him. In this way, Powers constructs Crazy Horse as a necessary sacrifice in the struggle to close the frontier. That is, the death of Crazy Horse is considered the means by which a new order would take place in the West. To develop this point, Powers draws upon the reports of military officials that met with Crazy Horse upon his agreement to come in to the agency. Powers tells us that military personnel described Crazy Horse as struck with sorrow, something that Lieutenant Lee noted as “inner agitation- fear, doubt, hope, confusion; he couldn’t settle later on a single word to describe it” (p. 391). At this point, Powers explains that Crazy Horse’s choice to surrender was an effort to end conflict and secure a future for his people. Meanwhile the Sioux already at the government agency, some of which had spent their lives fighting alongside Crazy Horse, were plotting to kill him. Such hostilities were not the only obstacle Crazy Horse faced in coming to terms with agency life. Powers explains that while Crazy Horse spoke with agency

officials “he had promised peace but was met repeatedly by anger, demands, and threats. His friends all gave him conflicting advice. The Army seemed to understand nothing he said” (p. 392).

The circumstances confronting Crazy Horse at the agency certainly were a dangerous environment for a man seeking peace. It is perplexing to think that Sioux had developed an allegiance to the very enemy which they once fought alongside Crazy Horse. However, when considering the government’s policy for “wild” Indians it becomes clear. Haines (2002) tells us that because Crazy Horse was so successful in fighting the Army, a shift in policy occurred which “implied that the Army would be on the offensive, forcing the Indians onto reservations and punishing those who did not comply” (p. 56). As such, Crazy Horse and the few remaining “hostiles” were becoming a threat not only to white Americans but also agency Sioux. In the following passage Powers describes a scene in which we see this policy come to fruition in full effect:

It was the arrest not the killing of Crazy Horse that Colonel Bradley had in mind when he dispatched his men to seize the chief on the morning of Tuesday, the 4th of September, 1877. But arrest only did not mean half measures; Bradley sent two groups strong enough for war- eight troops of cavalry and infantry under Colonel Julius Mason and four hundred friendly Indian scouts under Lieutenant Clark. The entire force numbered seven or eight hundred men. In Clark’s view the roster of chiefs supporting the soldiers proved the increasing isolation of Crazy Horse, whose village had dwindled in the first few days of September to about seventy lodges. More than twice that number had surrendered with him in May. Red Cloud, Little Wound, American Horse, and Young Man Afraid of His Horses all rode under Clark’s command. But that was not all. Clark had been working the Indians all summer, and among the scouts setting out to arrest the chief were some of Crazy Horse’s oldest friends, not only Little Big Man but others who had been by his side in the north for years like Jumping Shield, Big Road, and He Dog. Even one of Crazy Horse’s uncles, Bull Head, was among the scouts riding toward the chief’s village near the mouth of Little White Clay Creek.

In this particular passage Crazy Horse is portrayed as truly isolated from his community. Whereas Joseph Marshall's narrative interprets the isolation of Crazy Horse as a means for searching for answers to the issues confronting Lakota people, Powers narrative constructs his isolation as abandonment. At first it would seem as if Powers is attempting to shift the blame for Crazy Horse's death to the hands of Sioux people. This notion has been a point of controversy for historians for over half a century (Haines, 2002, p. 57). However, in the following passage Powers offers a different interpretation of the aforementioned passage.

From the many hesitations of Crazy Horse in the course of the morning it is clear that he was deeply apprehensive. What he wanted, he said, was to avoid trouble. The trouble he feared at Camp Robinson was not anything he planned to start himself. He had made no preparations for a fight, and was agreeing to put himself into a situation where a fight would be suicidal. What made him hesitate was a distrust of the whites, who had planned to kill him Monday night, sent eight hundred men to arrest him Tuesday morning, and put a price of two hundred dollars on his head when he tried to flee the "bad winds blowing" at the Red Cloud Agency. Arguing against the plain meaning of these bald facts were only the promises of Lieutenant Jesse Lee. In the end, Crazy Horse set aside his doubts and chose to trust Lee's repeated assurances that he would not be harmed, that he might move his people to Beaver Creek, that all might still be well. (p. 402)

As this particular passage indicates, the death of Crazy Horse was not the result of an isolated incident. Powers uses the sequence of events that resulted in the killing of Crazy Horse as a way of explaining that both sides played a part in his death. By demonstrating that both Sioux and U.S. governmental policy had a part to play in the killing of Crazy Horse, Powers attempts to provide some sort of justification in the matter. The idea here is that Crazy Horse was too dangerous to be kept alive. Haines (2002) tells us that while Crazy Horse had once been capable of leading Sioux into any battle, the government's commitment to bringing in the hostiles now put him in a position that he "alienated and frightened many of his own people" (p. 58).

Certainly his presence was something that concerned government officials and military personnel.

In the following pages, Powers describes the scene at Camp Robinson which resulted in the death of Crazy Horse. Conducive with other reports, Powers does not necessarily provide new material about how exactly Crazy Horse was killed. For quite some time biographers have mentioned that, upon realizing he was to be placed under arrest, Crazy Horse attempted to flee and was held back by agency Sioux while a white soldier mortally wounded him with a bayonet. What is different in Powers' narrative is that he constructs Crazy Horse as a man who sought peace while all others around him sought violence. In this way, readers see Crazy Horse as a martyr brought down by the very people who lacked the courage to sustain his campaign. The idea here is that Crazy Horse had to die in order for the remainder of Sioux people to survive. For Powers, the death of Crazy Horse signified that there was no place in American society for a wild Indian. Here we see a unique articulation of a mythic hero.

Generally speaking, a mythic hero is capable of overcoming a particular struggle. Joseph Campbell (1949) tells us that mythic heroes undergo a sort of rite of passage and that upon overcoming the foe, or struggle, the hero returns gloriously to the community from which he came (p. 30). For Crazy Horse, however, the community to which he devoted his heroism to protect would never be the same upon his return. In this way, Powers interprets the heroism of Crazy Horse as deriving from his willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. That is to say, Crazy Horse gave his life so that conflict would end and his people would have a future.

To interpret Crazy Horse in this way is an attempt to reconcile the trauma wrought in this particular period in American history. That is, Powers demonstrates that Crazy Horse was brought down by a series of events involving both American and Sioux plots to kill him. In this

way Powers attempts to shift the blame from an identifiable human source to the abstractions of governmental policy. While it often seems that America expansionism is to blame for the demise of Crazy Horse, Powers provides evidence that Sioux minds were involved in the plot to get Crazy Horse out of the way. In this way, the Sioux are seen to have betrayed Crazy Horse and white authority is viewed as the impetus for their betrayal.

It is as if the heroism of Crazy Horse on the field of battle ostracized him to a point that it became necessary for him to die in order to prevent further conflict. So, to view Crazy Horse as heroic invokes an image of a hero willing to give his life for his community, despite their betrayal. Thus Powers constructs Crazy Horse as a necessary sacrifice to prevent further bloodshed. This sort of heroism is perhaps least likely for readers to identify with. Certainly it is the most tragic. The focus on the events that culminated in the death of Crazy Horse serves to provide an understanding of why he was killed. Interpreting Crazy Horse in this way attempts to shed light on perhaps Crazy Horse's most courageous act—dying in service of his community.

Finally, the notion that Crazy Horse's friends and relatives played a part in his demise offers a critique of American politics. In this sense, the government's attempts to assimilate the Indian become far more dangerous for the hero than any sort of military presence. That is not to say that the military didn't play a part in enforcing the policy. However, because Crazy Horse fought the military and won on several occasions, one can deduce that his demise was not a result of military conquest. Because Powers interprets Crazy Horse as a peaceful man upon his surrender, his death is seen as a result of miscommunication and corrupt bureaucratic principles. In a way similar to Marshall, Powers has demonstrated that the notion that Crazy Horse was a violent man can be destructive. For Powers, Crazy Horse sought a peaceful relationship with whites and agency Sioux and was greeted with the sharp end of a bayonet.

Conclusion

“Over the years, Crazy Horse has been elevated from a skilled warrior to the Lakota symbol of resistance to white domination and cultural assimilation. He has not only become a political and spiritual martyr for all Indian people, but a heroic symbol for those people lamenting both the methods employed by American expansionists and the consequences of their conquest.”

-Richard Grimes

As I've attempted to show, Crazy Horse continues to resurface as a person of historical significance in the American imagination of the closing of the frontier. However, due to an absence of primary sources we still lack a clear picture of what he was like as a person. Because we have very little proof of what he looked like and what he did, the biographer is capable of developing a narrative about Crazy Horse to his or her own ends. I believe that what each author has done in this study did is draw upon their individual insights, whether from a cultural standpoint or from their professional background, to construct Crazy Horse as a distinct type of mythic hero. To demonstrate this, I have used the insights of scholars from a variety of disciplines that focus on the ways in which stories function rhetorically. Because a myth is a sort of meta-narrative, I have provided a theoretical backing in myth and narrative to demonstrate the persuasive potential in storytelling. I consider the biographical representations of Crazy Horse as different articulations of the Crazy Horse myth. What each author does is construct Crazy Horse anew by placing him within their own mythic framework. In this way, the lack of evidence available about Crazy Horse lends itself to each biographer to emphasize certain characteristics of heroism that they may attribute to his story. As such, each author chooses to highlight different characteristics about Crazy Horse to achieve their purpose. While each author claims to have a particular insight about who Crazy Horse was as a person, the absence of factual information forces the biographer to fill in details that do not necessarily reflect reality. It also,

however, provides an opportunity for biographers to reconstruct Crazy Horse to fit the present needs in society. While we can't prove who Crazy Horse was, we also cannot prove who he was not.

I have also shown that because Crazy Horse is such an enigmatic figure, each biographer relies on their particular insight to appear credible to retell his story. Moreover, the particular cultural or professional experience of each author serves as a lens by which they construct their interpretation of Crazy Horse. In other words, it makes sense that Stephen Ambrose would focus on the warrior prowess of Crazy Horse when considering his prior works focus on military history. For Joseph Marshall, his version of the Crazy Horse myth emerges by privileging his access to inclusive oral tradition. Finally, Thomas Powers draws upon his career in investigative journalism to impress upon readers the notion that he is uncovering "new" information about an event in Crazy Horse's life that has received the least amount of attention in prior narratives. As I have suggested, each biographer competes for a more valid representation of who Crazy Horse was as a person. While the absence of primary sources may at first seem to restrict the biographer, I believe that it actually provides an opportunity for each author to draw Crazy Horse into the framework of a mythic hero.

As I have suggested, myths are stories that focus on an exceptional hero triumphing over an evil force that is threatening a particular community. In this sense the hero is most often portrayed as the only individual capable of overcoming the threat. Thus, the heroic individual is capable of meeting the needs of his or her society by overcoming the struggle. I have shown that each biography of Crazy Horse interprets his heroism by emphasizing a different sort of struggle he must overcome. I have shown that Stephen Ambrose interprets Crazy Horse as a heroic individual because of the crucial role he played in the violent conflicts between Sioux and U.S.

forces. Crazy Horse becomes heroic here because no one expected the Sioux to be as successful as they were fighting the more powerful U.S. military. I have also shown that Joseph Marshall emphasizes the generosity of Crazy Horse to highlight that he was a man dedicated to his people first and a warrior second. Viewing Crazy Horse in this way is to align the narrative of Crazy Horse in favor of traditional Sioux values for which Crazy Horse is the mold. Finally, I have shown that Thomas Powers portrays Crazy Horse as a heroic individual because he was willing to sacrifice his own life in service of his people.

Moreover, I have shown that much of the notoriety attributed to Crazy Horse stems from the relationship he has in the closing of the frontier. In this way, the myth of Crazy Horse can be viewed as a revised narrative of frontier experiences told from the perspective of an American Indian-centered point of view. I have also suggested that the frontier myth is imbued with a cultural significance that can be seen in both American political rhetoric and popular culture. The idea here is that because American expansionism was successful, Americans could apply similar principles on other “distant” frontiers. In this sense, the notion of the frontier has generated an ideology that Americans must subdue and colonize all, whether on a distant battlefield or the vast emptiness of space.

However, the fact that Crazy Horse is interpreted as a hero in each retelling carries an implicit critique of the values present in the frontier myth. Because Crazy Horse fought so adamantly against westward expansion, he has become an exemplary historical figure that demonstrates the dangers present in such an ideology. In this way, the myth of Crazy Horse attempts to turn the values present in frontier rhetoric upside down. That is, Crazy Horse emerges in each text as antithetical to the American value system. In this way, Crazy Horse is

portrayed as a sort of cultural blueprint for the values each biographer desires and does not see in American society.

As I have argued, the reason why the story of Crazy Horse continues to be retold is because he is capable of fitting a wide range of heroic characteristics. The historical accuracy of each retelling of the Crazy Horse story is of little consequence when considering the functions of a mythic hero. However, there are certain implications these interpretations of Crazy Horse have for our perception of this particular time in history. One way that the myth of Crazy Horse has altered the perception of that time is by highlighting the injustice wrought upon Sioux people at the hands of corrupt governmental policies and an onslaught of land-hungry American settlers. To view this time period from this perspective is to say that America was not as virtuous a nation as it claims to be. In this way, each author makes the case that the culture of America at that time was imperialistic. From a rhetorical standpoint, the myth of Crazy Horse has and continues to serve an implicit critique of the values of American expansionism.

To close, it is useful to turn back to the Crazy Horse Memorial. The fact that the monument is still incomplete over half a century of construction, I believe, can be linked to the biographical representations of Crazy Horse. In an attempt to call attention to the competing narratives about Crazy Horse, Richard Grimes (2000) wrote that “the war leader of the Oglalas awaits a definitive biographer” (p. 302) The issue to which Grimes refers is that in all the retellings of the Crazy Horse story, none have been capable of standing against the rigors of historical proof. At times it seems as if the Crazy Horse Memorial will never be complete. While the construction process continues to try and shape an image of the warrior out of rock, biographers continue to transform the way we think about Crazy Horse as a historical figure. What is perhaps the most interesting link between the monument and recent biographies about

Crazy Horse is a decreased emphasis on his warrior qualities. For example, the Crazy Horse Memorial shows Crazy Horse to be unharmed sitting atop a horse pointing, perhaps ironically, toward the iconic Mt. Rushmore that sits only seventeen miles away. This is an interesting pose for a man whose notoriety stems from his ability to vanquish his enemies.




In a similar way, since Stephen Ambrose’s interpretation of Crazy Horse the “American” warrior in 1976, biographers have chosen to emphasize a less violent version of Crazy Horse. Certainly his exceptional warrior qualities will always be a part of the tale. However, because Crazy Horse is interpreted within a mythic framework his story is able to transcend the archetype of a warrior. As I have shown, both Joseph Marshall and Thomas Powers construct Crazy Horse as a mythic hero whose cultural significance is tied to his generosity and the many sacrifices he made in service of his people.

In sum, we may never see the Crazy Horse Memorial complete and it seems that Crazy Horse will never receive a “definitive biographer.” As much as each biographer claims to have a particular insight into the life of Crazy Horse, I argue that we should think of their versions as attempts to use Crazy Horse’s story as a means by which they may provide alternative ways of thinking about America’s past. Moreover, their interpretations of Crazy Horse provide the

rhetorical critic with a representation of each author's attempt to use a mythic figure to deal with current problems in society.

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