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THE PICTURE CHANGES

STYLISTIC VARIATION IN SITTING BULL'S BIOGRAPHIES

BARBARA RISCH

Until the 1800s Indian warriors of the Plains recorded significant heroic events from their adventures and pursuits in pictographs, on hide. Then, during the nineteenth century, these pictographs began to be produced on paper as well. About the same time that paper was coming into use, canvas and muslin became available, and the drawings that had formerly been composed on hide began to appear on these new materials. Typically, Indian men made use of discarded or captured ledgers, memorandum books, or rosters to render their exploit narratives; the representation of such events on these materials is referred to as ledger art.¹

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The subject matter in ledger biography was much the same as that of hide painting, where narratives revealing coup scenes appeared on tipi-liners, mats, and robes. These scenes included horse captures, counting coup, and other confrontations with enemies. The great theme of Plains Indian biographic narrative was counting coup, and integral to this was the chase. Touching an enemy with a coup stick, defeating an enemy in battle, and capturing enemy horses are visual instantiations of this theme. Used as a text in the social context of oratory, the pictorial narratives were echoed by song, dance, and drama. In cultures with oral narrative traditions, storytelling is a vibrant communal force, and occasions for oral narrative are numerous. Among Plains Indians, pictography and oral narrative were sustained together as a social medium—they dramatized society's view of the world, as well as appropriate behaviors and relationships.

Among Plains warriors, what have been called *autobiographies* were particularly common.² These records represented important events of valor in their lives as warriors, deeds that entitled them to special honors.³ The pictographic narratives were primarily concerned

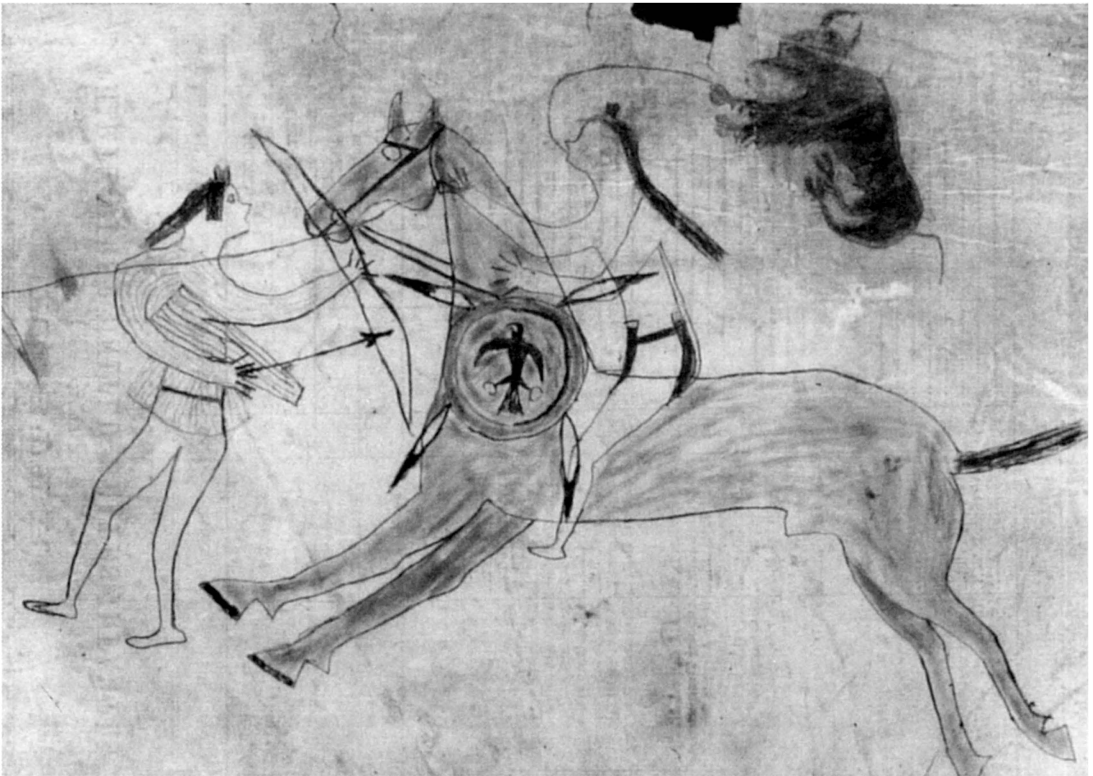


FIG. 1. *First Coup*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

with representing scenes of interaction, usually involving pursuit or confrontation. Features of the surrounding environment are likely to be sparse. People and horses are the primary figures in these interactions, in scenes that typically refer to the opposition of two embattled individuals or groups. Warriors rose in esteem not only by behaving honorably but just as importantly by committing these deeds to public record. When a warrior's deeds were socially acknowledged and honored, he gained rank, respect, and influence.⁴

This essay looks at three picto-narratives that chronicle Sitting Bull's deeds as a warrior. The earliest is thought to have been composed around 1870, before captivity, and the other two after his surrender. The three records are commonly referred to by the family name

of those who donated them to a particular museum. All are considered fundamentally traditional in both subject matter and technique. The Kimball and Smith records are in the possession of the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution. The Quimby record is held by the Fort St. Joseph Museum of Niles, Michigan. Figure 1 is from the Kimball record, which is the earliest document. Sitting Bull later acknowledged creating an original and leaving it in the care of his "brother," Jumping Bull. While in Jumping Bull's care, at least two copies of the record were made by Four Horns, Sitting Bull's uncle. According to some sources, warriors would carry their picto-narratives with them into battle, reenacting their deeds in camps along the way.⁵ Many of the ledger

drawings in collections today were taken from the bodies of slain Indians. Others, such as this one from the Kimball record, were sold, traded for provisions, or given as gifts. In August 1870 the Kimball record was brought to Fort Buford by an Indian and traded for provisions worth \$1.50.

The copied scenes, representing forty events from Sitting Bull's life, were composed on the reverse side of roster pages of the thirty-first US infantry, in watercolor, graphite, and ink. The objects and figures were all drawn in flat profile (traditional pictographic style), predominantly looking and moving from right to left. Sitting Bull is identified by name glyph, the figure of a bull above his head. Assistant Surgeon of the Army James C. Kimball soon acquired the record and in the same year solicited verbal notes from some Lakota at the post who claimed familiarity with Sitting Bull's life. He then sent the picto-narratives and the accompanying verbal text to the curator of the Army Medical Museum in Washington, D.C. Many of the interpretations are quite brief, tightly focused on the event itself, and provide little background information about how the event was understood in a cultural context.⁶

Sitting Bull identified this (Fig. 1) as his first feat as a warrior, which took place when he was fourteen years old. He charges a Crow Indian, who is in the act of drawing his bow, and counts coup on him. In this record, the Crow are identified by a topknot of hair, extending upward from the forehead, with thick sideburns. Here, Sitting Bull's hair is arranged in a topknot as well, minus the sideburns. The horses and participants are drawn in fairly flat profile, as is traditional, with the action moving from right to left. The agent, Sitting Bull, is positioned to the right, his name glyph appearing as a symbol of identification. He is also represented carrying his shield, which his father had made for him, portraying a bird with outstretched wings. The coup stick is extended forward, out of Sitting Bull's hand, suggesting victory.

Figure 2 represents Sitting Bull's first encounter with Jumping Bull. Sitting Bull wears the horned feathercap of a Strong Heart warrior, designating himself as such. It was a tight-fitting cap with short crow feathers, streamers of ermine, and a pair of buffalo horns. Jumping Bull is shown falling forward, an arrow in the right hand, and a bow or coup stick in the left. Sitting Bull strikes him with a lance that his mother had made, covered by blue and white beading.

According to Stanley Vestal, a respected biographer of Sitting Bull, the event occurred in the winter of 1857, when Sitting Bull and his warriors set out to raid a nearby Hohe camp. As the action progressed, an eleven-year-boy was left standing as the last survivor of his family. When the Lakota approached to kill him, he cried out to Sitting Bull to save him, which he did, and subsequently invited him into *his* family. He was later given the name of Sitting Bull's father, Jumping Bull.⁷

In addition to the forty events characterizing scenes from Sitting Bull's life, the Kimball record also contains fourteen scenes where Jumping Bull is the agent. Within standard textual expectations, the fact that this is a copy made by Four Horns, and includes biographic entries of Jumping Bull, may cause problems with notions of authorship and the genre of biography. However, picto-narratives were created and used in the context of oratory. In conventions associated with oral narrative, authoring does not necessarily imply the kind of exclusive property interest that we accrue to the creator of something unique today. With regard to ownership or authorship, many genres of narrative, spoken or sung, were the common property of a social group within a larger community.⁸ Biographic picto-narratives would also have been part of a collective record of a group, such as a medicine or warrior society. Further, Four Horns and Jumping Bull are first part of Sitting Bull's family.

The authenticity of the document and the force of the imagery rested with the truth of the individual's power in that act. War honors



FIG. 2. *With Jumping Bull*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

required proof, which typically included the concurrence of witnesses. With a warrior's oratory, it was common for companions who had participated in the event to be present and also participate in the telling.⁹ If the graphic presentation of events was carried out in a manner similar to oratory, a visual textual record was also jointly created and authenticated.

In the Kimball record, events were arranged according to topic or thematic category rather than chronological order. In general, the stricter the chronological order in native biography, the greater the Euro-American influence.¹⁰ All of the events portrayed are coup narratives, depicting scenes of horse capture and battle. Of the forty events depicted, a full

twenty-one refer to capturing horses or mules, twelve exclusively. Fifteen events depict encounters with other Indians, primarily Crow and Arikara. It should be noted that Sitting Bull's father was killed in a fight with the Crow.

Interpretive notes to accompany this first record were provided by unidentified Indians at Fort Buford in 1870 who claimed familiarity with Sitting Bull's life. The notes are quite brief. Later, they were supplemented with notes from Vestal. For example, for Figure 3, according to the original notes from the Kimball record, Sitting Bull "steals and runs off a drove of horses from the Crows." In contrast, Vestal's interpretation reads, "1863-64 (winter). Sitting Bull brings home nine Crow ponies: five bays, two blacks, one buckskin mule, and a

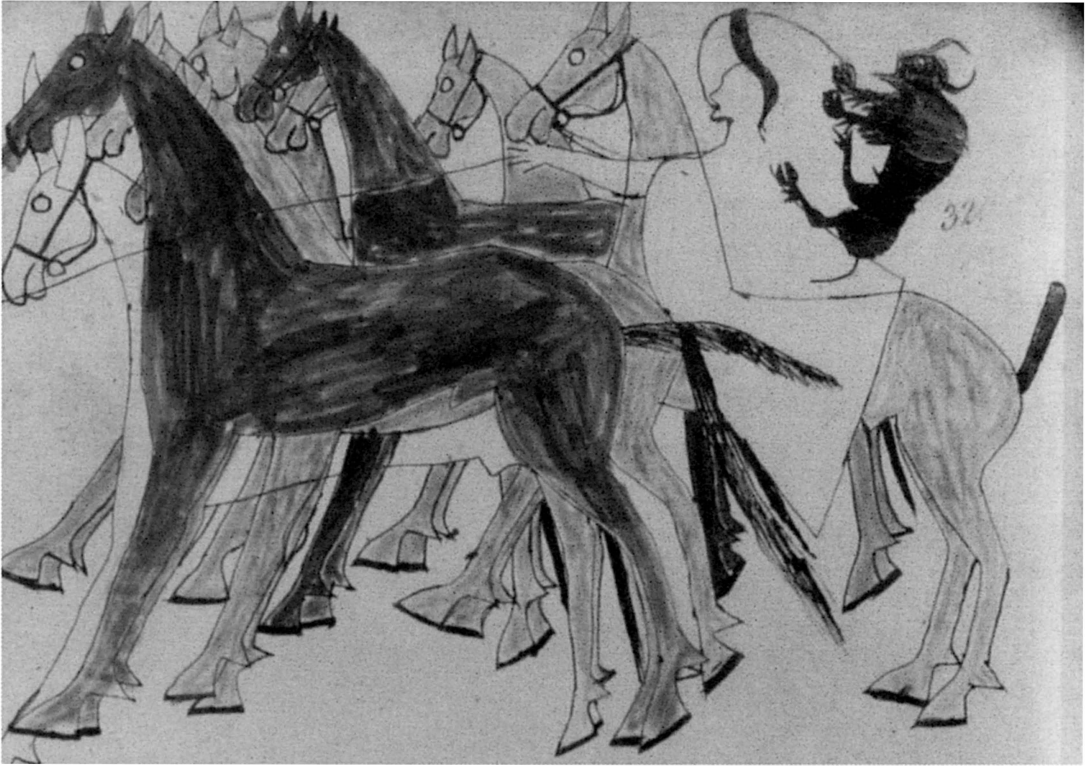


FIG. 3. *Capturing Crow Ponies*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

little white mare. The mare he gave to his favorite sister, Pretty Plume."¹¹

In Vestal's interpretive notes, for six of the horse-capturing scenes he makes reference to Sitting Bull giving the horses away. For Figure 4, Kimball's notes read, "In an engagement, captures a horse, a mule and a scalp." In contrast, Vestal provides the following: "1860, amid a shower of bullets which fill the air, Sitting Bull riding his famous war horse Blackie, runs off two animals from a Crow camp. One of them is a branded army mule, picked up or stolen by the Crows. These animals Sitting Bull gave for Brown Eyes, the girl who became his fourth wife."¹²

The scalp decoration on the horse's halter, mentioned in the Kimball notes, is conven-

tional insignia for a successful outcome. Sitting Bull is again identified by his name glyph and shield. Though Vestal interprets the lines that fill the background of the frame as "a shower of bullets," there are no distinct circles at the ends of the lines, suggesting that they more likely signify speed.

In many ways, horse-capturing was not only an honorable act but an economic necessity. Horses provided social and economic foundations for Plains culture. Marriages could be secured through customs where horses were exchanged, generating an expansion of kin relationships and more children. The giving away of horses was a way to demonstrate generosity. Also, leaving these animals to succeeding generations provided

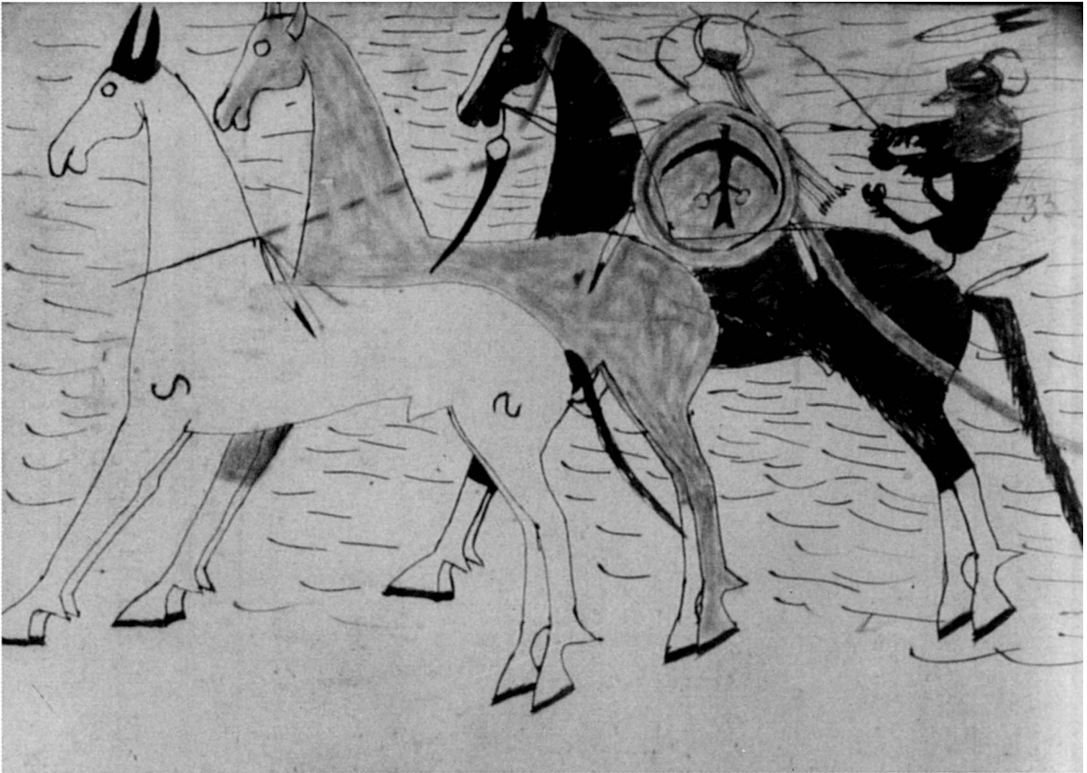


FIG. 4. *More Crow Animals*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

descendants with the basic means to carry on an established way of life.¹³

According to Vestal, "Sitting Bull was such a noted horse raider that the old men say nobody can remember all his raids. Chief Charging Thunder stated that to his own knowledge, Sitting Bull took horses from the Crows twenty times, sometimes as many as thirty head" (see Fig. 5).¹⁴

What may not be evident in the narrative scenes reproduced here, but emerges quite naturally and convincingly when one views the actual texts, are the figures to which Four Horns lends exquisite detail. These are the name glyph and the shield—the primary elements for the identification of the agent. As mentioned earlier, the shield was made

for Sitting Bull by his father on the occasion of his first coup. According to One Bull, who grew up in Sitting Bull's tent and was later interviewed by Vestal, the bird of the design actually represents a manlike being who appeared to Sitting Bull's father in a vision—a being with a dark body and many feathers growing from his extended arms. The blue color represents the sky; the figure was that of a being from above and the feathers on his arms showed that he lived above. The four eagle tail feathers on the edge of the shield stand for the four directions. The eagle feather was also a badge of honor and stood for success. Therefore, the man who carried this shield would be protected wherever he roamed.¹⁵ It has been suggested by



FIG. 5. *Great Horse-Capture*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

others that the blue color indicates the thunderbird and also that the four feathers signify the four virtues of a Hunkpapa warrior: bravery, fortitude, generosity, and wisdom.¹⁶

Horses were important to Lakota culture for a variety of reasons. They decreased a group's labor while increasing their mobility, allowing them to expand into new lands at the periphery of their territory and thereby gain greater access to materials necessary for survival, let alone prosperity. However, although one group might benefit from these excursions, they usually infringed on another group's territory, often resulting in confrontation and conflict. Plains Indian warfare was a steady competition for resources that were

becoming increasingly scarce yet essential to the Indian way of life.¹⁷

In addition to horse captures, the coup narratives of the Kimball record include scenes of confrontations with whites as well as other Indians. In Figure 6, Sitting Bull is wounded in the foot, a wound that troubled him for the rest of his life. The Crow is wounded in the gut; both bleed freely. Although Sitting Bull appears in the horned feathercap here, in many other scenes with the Crow his hair is arranged in a topknot, as in Figure 7. The topknot is conventional insignia for the Crow. It is difficult to resist inferring that Sitting Bull disguised himself in such ways to gain advantage over his enemies. In the Kimball record, the notes for Figure 7 referred simply



FIG. 6. *Sitting Bull Wounded*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

to the killing of a Crow Indian. After Sitting Bull's surrender, he amended the original notes, saying that his opponent was an Arikara Indian who dropped his gun and bow from fear. He also pointed out that he only counted coup, indicated by the fact that no blood is shown.

After the Battle of Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull and his people fled from the troops into Canada. There he remained until Canadian authorities mediated his surrender. When asked about Custer and the battle, Sitting Bull remarked, "I did not hunt Custer. I thought I had a right to protect my own women and children. It was a fair fight."¹⁸ Shortly after his surrender in 1881, the army enlisted the aid of Reverend John P. Williamson, a missionary

with the Lakota, to take the Kimball record to Sitting Bull and find out what explanation or interpretation he could offer.¹⁹ Williamson responded to the commander at Fort Randall that Sitting Bull immediately recognized the scenes from his early life, said that they were all true scenes, and verified "in the main" the interpretations of the pictures. He identified the representation of his first coup at age fourteen. He used a scene from an encounter with a Arikara to point out that it represented counting coup, not killing, as no blood was shown. He also remarked that one scene was incomplete because it did not bear his name glyph. In the closing of his letter, Williamson added, "As to the particular history of each event recorded, we found Sitting Bull rather

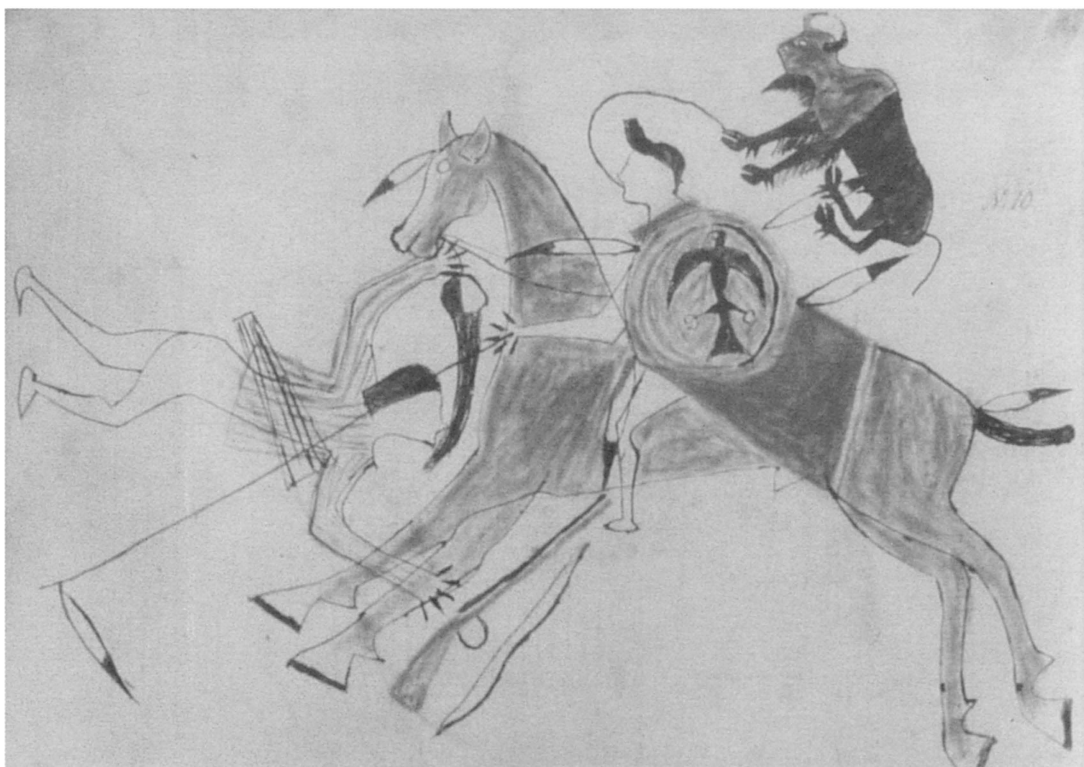


FIG. 7. *Counting Coup on an Arikara*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

reserved, especially in regards to scenes nos. 11 to 26, and we could see that any narration he gave of the events was colored by the circumstances of his present situation. And I would suggest that if a more full account of his war deeds is desired, a better time to secure it would be at some future date, when his status is definitely determined."²⁰ Scenes 11 through 26 all depict encounters with whites.

As in conventional in the representation of whites, they are easily identified by their hats. Of the fifteen scenes here, nine represent counting coup, six do not. In Figure 8, Sitting Bull, wounded in the hip, appears with his hair in a topknot, facing a white opponent. The white man has an arrow through his chest and is bleeding from his wounds. Blood gushes

from his nose and mouth, indicating his demise. According to Vestal, the white man is a soldier who has already been wounded by an arrow from behind, yet still turns to fire on Sitting Bull as he charges him through a shower of bullets.²¹ Again, in the background there appear to be lines indicating speed rather than bullets. The long lines radiating from the end of the white man's rifle, resulting in Sitting Bull's wound, definitely indicate gunfire.

In only five of the confrontations with whites do Sitting Bull's opponents face him. For Figure 9, Vestal's notes report that Sitting Bull counts coup on a white man armed with a whip and makes off with his saddled mule. The white man is not wounded, yet the halter decoration on Sitting Bull's horse indicates

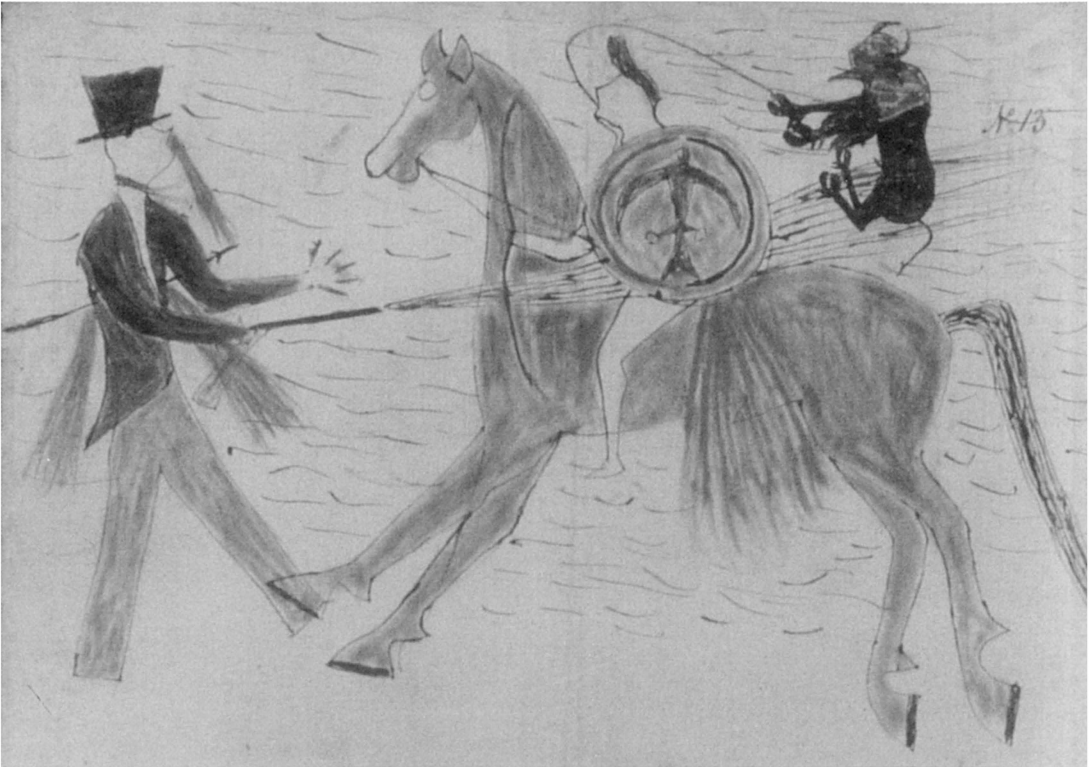


FIG. 8. *Facing a White Opponent*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

victory. Again, Sitting Bull portrays himself in the topknot of the Crow. The shirt is curious. Such lines could be used to indicate tracks, signifying recent participation in the Sun Dance, but in such cases they were usually painted red or yellow.

In Figure 10, the upper body of the white man is decorated in a similar fashion. Vestal suggests that these lines represent body hair, a white physical trait considered particularly unattractive, but it seems unlikely that Sitting Bull would depict himself in that way. As in most of the representations of whites, the man is not facing Sitting Bull, but fleeing. In encounters with whites, Sitting Bull is always shown with the foreknot, or as here, with a bandana. The horned feathercap never ap-

pears. Conversely, the bandana never appears in encounters with other Indians.

When whites were incorporated in oral narrative traditions, they were typically assigned the role of antagonist or fool.²² Here, in Sitting Bull's record, they most often appear as cowards, fleeing. While the Plains Indians' facility at warfare has been repeatedly attested to by Indians and whites alike,²³ that does not seem to be the only meaning here. Sitting Bull's constant frustration with the American government and their representatives was that he perceived them as liars. For example, in October 1878 the US government sent a commission to Canada, led by Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, to talk to Sitting Bull. General Terry opened

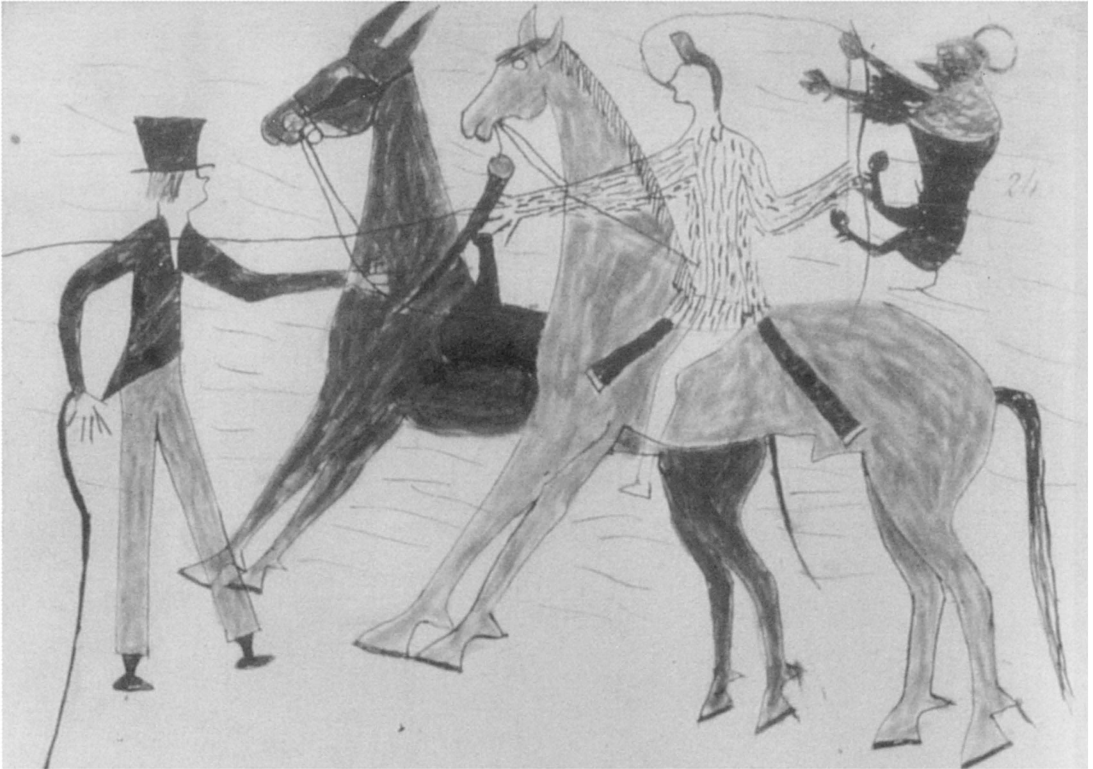


FIG. 9. *Counts Coup on a White Man*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

the discussion offering peace to the Lakota, a full pardon to those who surrendered, and a “fair” exchange of food, clothing, and cows for the guns and horses they were to surrender.

An excerpt of Sitting Bull’s response (through an interpreter) reads: “Look at me. I have ears. I have eyes to see with. If you think me a fool, you are a bigger fool than I am. . . . you come here to tell us lies, but we do not want to listen to them. I don’t wish such language used to me, or any such lies told to me . . . don’t say two more words. Go back where you came from.”²⁴ From the representations of whites in Sitting Bull’s pictographic record, it would appear that being a liar entails being a coward.

Sitting Bull finally surrendered to the United States government at Fort Buford on Tuesday, 19 July 1881. At his surrender, as his son Crowfoot handed over his gun, part of what he said through an interpreter is as follows: “This boy has given it (the gun) to you and he now wants to know how he is going to make a living. Whatever you have to give or whatever you have to say would like to see or hear now, for I don’t wish to be kept in darkness longer.”²⁵

By the time military outposts had been established in western Indian country, the Indians had a long history of experience in dealing with white traders. Interest in the collection of Indian artifacts increased steadily throughout the nineteenth century. The practices of

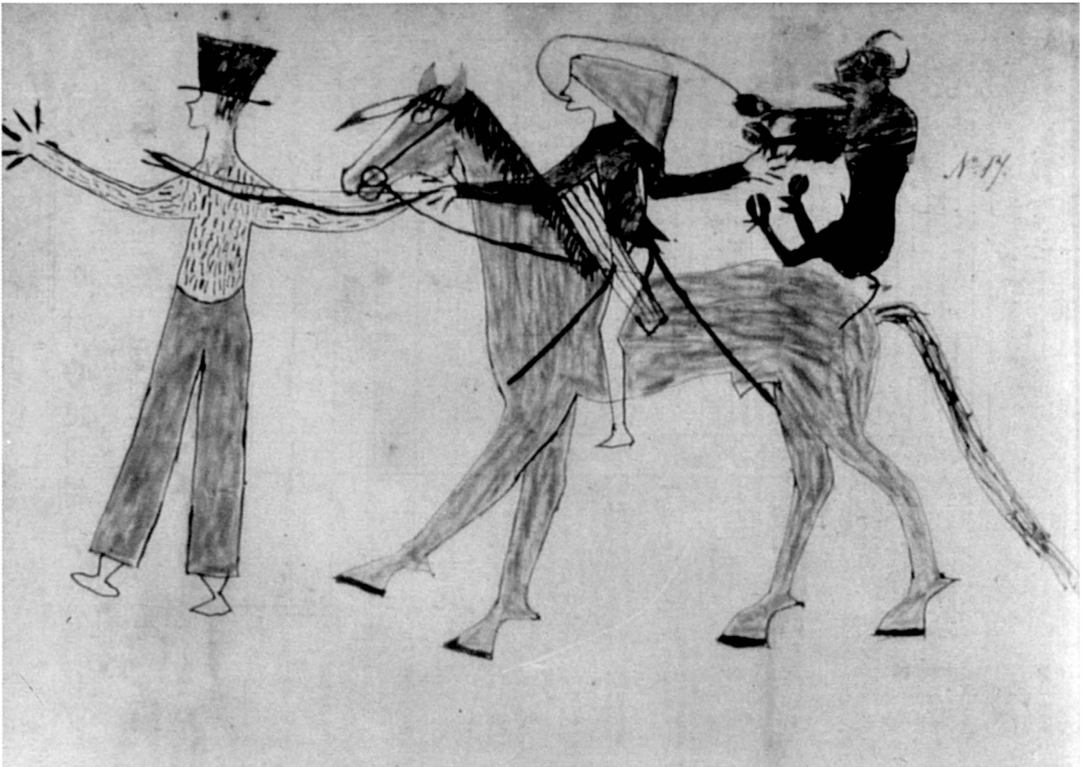


FIG. 10. *White Man Fleeing*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

traders, officers, and enlisted men had helped to make the outposts centers for the buying and selling of Indian artifacts and art.²⁶

After Sitting Bull's arrival at Fort Buford, the residents there attempted to acquire souvenirs from the Indians before they were moved down river. Some of the people with Sitting Bull traded at the post store for clothing and food. Others had their belongings sold at auction to the traders, who in turn sold them as souvenirs.²⁷ On Friday, 29 July, Sitting Bull and his followers boarded a government stern wheeler and embarked to Fort Yates. On Sunday, 31 July, the steamer docked at Bismark for the day. Hundreds of residents came to see Sitting Bull and shake his hand, where he reportedly "turned his ability to sign his name

into an astonishing financial gain, charging from \$2 to \$5 per autograph."²⁸

After his surrender, Sitting Bull was held for two years at Fort Randall before being sent to Standing Rock. For better or worse, he had gained great notoriety among the whites. While at Fort Randall, he was visited by many white soldiers, writers, artists, missionaries, and travelers and generally treated with respect. Letters poured in daily from around the globe. In fact, there were so many letters that in September 1882, Colonel George P. Ahern of Fort Randall was assigned to take charge of Sitting Bull's mail. Reportedly, Sitting Bull would not answer a letter or send any other form of autograph unless a dollar was sent in advance.²⁹

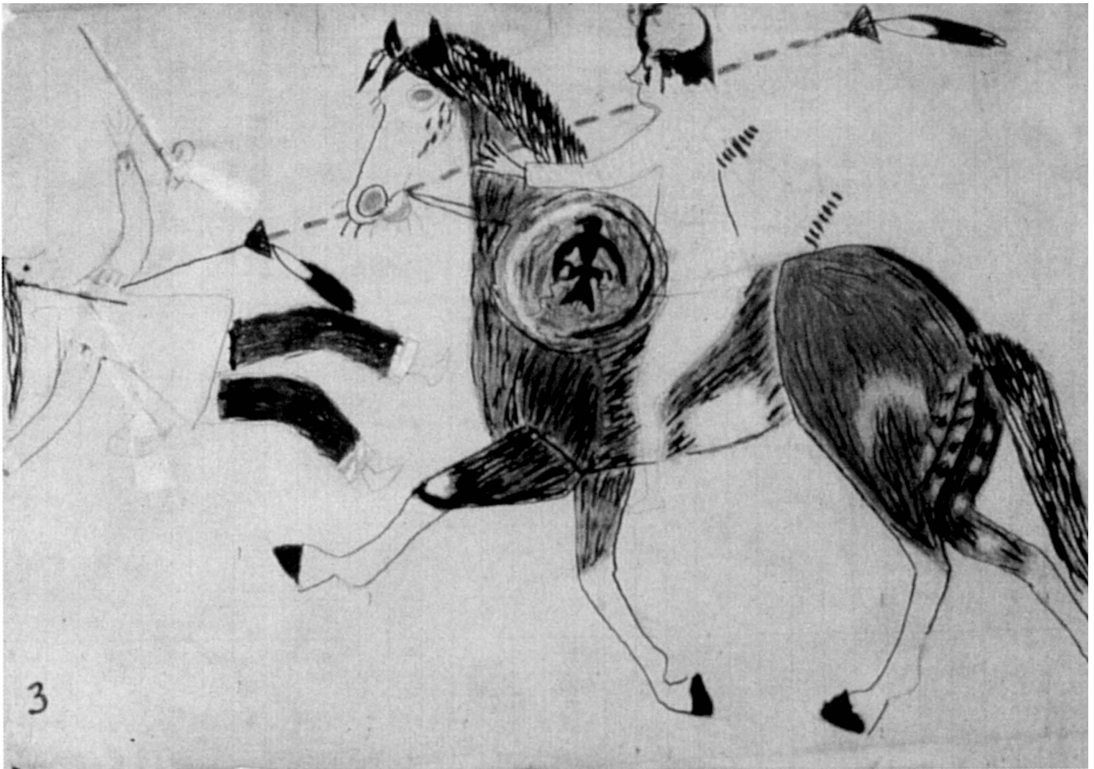


FIG. 11. *The Horned Eagle Feathercap*. Courtesy of the Fort St. Joseph Museum.

During his time at Fort Randall, Sitting Bull composed at least three more pictographic autobiographies. Two of those are discussed here. Figure 11 is part of the Quimby record, in the possession of the Fort St. Joseph Historical Association Museum in Niles, Michigan. Captain Quimby was Quartermaster at Fort Randall during Sitting Bull's time there. His wife, along with her sister and their children, reportedly visited the Lakota camp near the fort often, bringing food, clothing, and blankets, primarily for the children. The pictographs seem to have been composed individually, over an extended period of time, and presented by Sitting Bull to Mrs. Quimby's youngest daughter, Alice, on separate occasions as gifts. There are thir-

teen records in the Quimby collection, one unfinished.

Although the pictographic entries are numbered, it is not clear by whom, or whether this was the order of production. There is no chronological order. The records were kept in a ledger book by Captain Quimby. The flyleaf of the letter contains interpretations, but it would seem that they were not directly supplied by Sitting Bull. They may have been supplied by the family, from memory, at a later date.

Prior to the reservation period, the reproduction of pictographic documents for trade or sale was no more than a secondary function. The primary context for the use of the record, and the accompanying narrative,

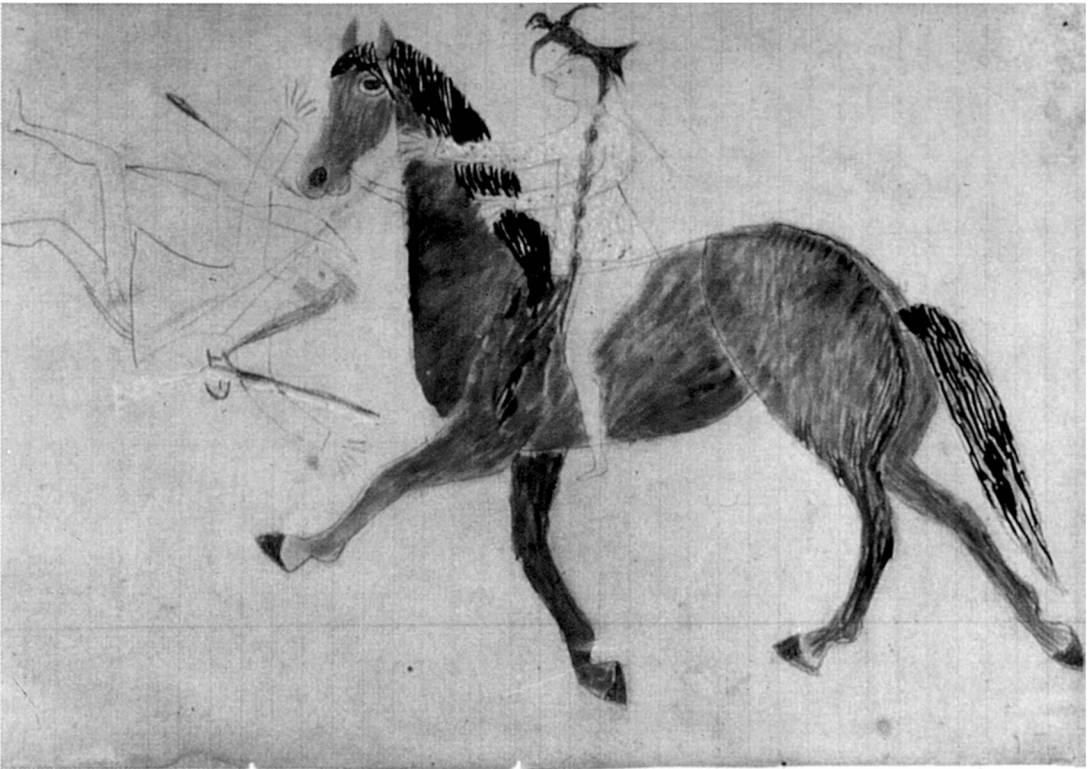


FIG. 12. *Bird as Name Glyph*. Courtesy of the Fort St. Joseph Museum.

resided in the wide range of the Plains and the way of life that it encompassed. Later, their most practical use was as a means of income or trade. Although the context for the production of the exploit narrative had changed, Sitting Bull nonetheless composed the Quimby record in his tent, likely surrounded by friends who had witnessed the events. During the reservation period, horse-capturing scenes and encounters with whites disappear altogether. Prior victory over whites is indicated by the inclusion of white cultural items. A brand on the horse indicates prior ownership by whites.

Whites who vied for the records viewed them more as pictures than narrative. It is commonly held that, in response, the characters or features of the picture take on greater

qualities of realism. Detail given to the horses would also demonstrate, especially to whites, the importance the Lakota placed on the horse. Horses not only indicated wealth and prestige, they represented an entire way of life. In Sitting Bull's later records, qualities of realism in terms of depth, roundedness, and overall attention to detail are lent to the horses. Shortly after his arrival at Fort Randall in 1881, he had gained some exposure to western art from a German illustrator, Rudolph Croneau. It has also been suggested that later, after his travels with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, he came to draw his horses to look like the fully muscled parade animals of the circus.³⁰

Horses dominate the scene in Sitting Bull's later records. In this record (Fig. 11), he typi-

cally lends little attention to the costume of his opponents, and even less to his own physical form. However, his blue and white beaded lance, for which his mother made the beading at the same time his father made the shield, is prominently displayed.³¹

A variety of headgear adorns Sitting Bull in this record, including the horned eagle feather cap, the full-feathered headdress, and a bird. The horned eagle feather cap appears three times, the full-feathered headdress four. The bird over his head, as in Figure 12, appears often in later records and is most interesting. Vestal reported that the bird is a chicken hawk, skinned and stuffed, that was worn as part of an obligation regarding his shield.³² However, the similarity of the bird over his head to the one that is otherwise used to mark his shield is unmistakable. It is also curious that the bird over the head never appears in representations where the shield is present.

During the reservation period, the function and form of the name glyph changed. Typically, it fell out of use altogether. Sometimes, it was replaced by a name written in English. Here it would seem that the symbolism of the bird has replaced the name glyph, suggesting that the representation of the power of the shield has been extended to serve as an even more primary mark of identification.

The third autobiographical record of Sitting Bull was donated to the Smithsonian by Robert A. Smith, whose father had obtained it from Lt. Wallace Tear, who was stationed at Fort Randall. The record is currently in the possession of the National Anthropology Archives. Lieutenant Tear had provided Sitting Bull with the drawing materials, and Sitting Bull then exchanged the drawings for blankets and clothing for the Lakota children in winter. In the Smith record, he substitutes his written English name for the traditional name glyph, but, like the name glyph, it is sometimes attached to his person by a line. The horses become realistic enough that people who were familiar with Sitting Bull were said to recognize them from their markings.³³

The interpretations for the Smith record are unique, as Sitting Bull provided rather detailed explanations himself (through an interpreter) at the time of their production. Much of his verbal narrative bears traits of self-vindication. In general, biography in any culture would seem to result from a social tendency toward self-examination. Self-examination and self-vindication are among a people's primary instruments of socialization. The early "as told to" Indian autobiographies (such as those of Black Hawk, Black Elk, and Geronimo) are largely self-examinations and self-vindications that seem to arise from tradition. At this time, however, during the early reservation period, the story of one's life was also used in an attempt to explain cultural beliefs and actions to outsiders.

The notes that Sitting Bull provided lend themselves to a richer interpretation. Typically, they included reference to his age at the time of the event, the place, the number of Lakota, and others involved or killed in the encounter, the reasons for the encounter, and the outstanding feature of the event, suggesting that these elements of the theme are important to the structure of the traditional oral narrative or to his explanation to whites. While describing the picture seen in Figure 13, Sitting Bull speaks of himself in the third person:

Same fight. Woman captured by Bull. The warrior touches woman with his lance and she becomes a prisoner. Warriors never strikes a woman in a fight except to save his own life. These women were kept with the Sioux a short time and then sent back to their own people except 3 who married Sioux warriors and remained; one of them here now. No one killed in this fight. Assiniboines passing thro Land of the Sioux.³⁴

In the Smith record, there also appears an account of the meeting of Sitting Bull and Jumping Bull. For the event represented by Figure 14, Sitting Bull provides the following description:

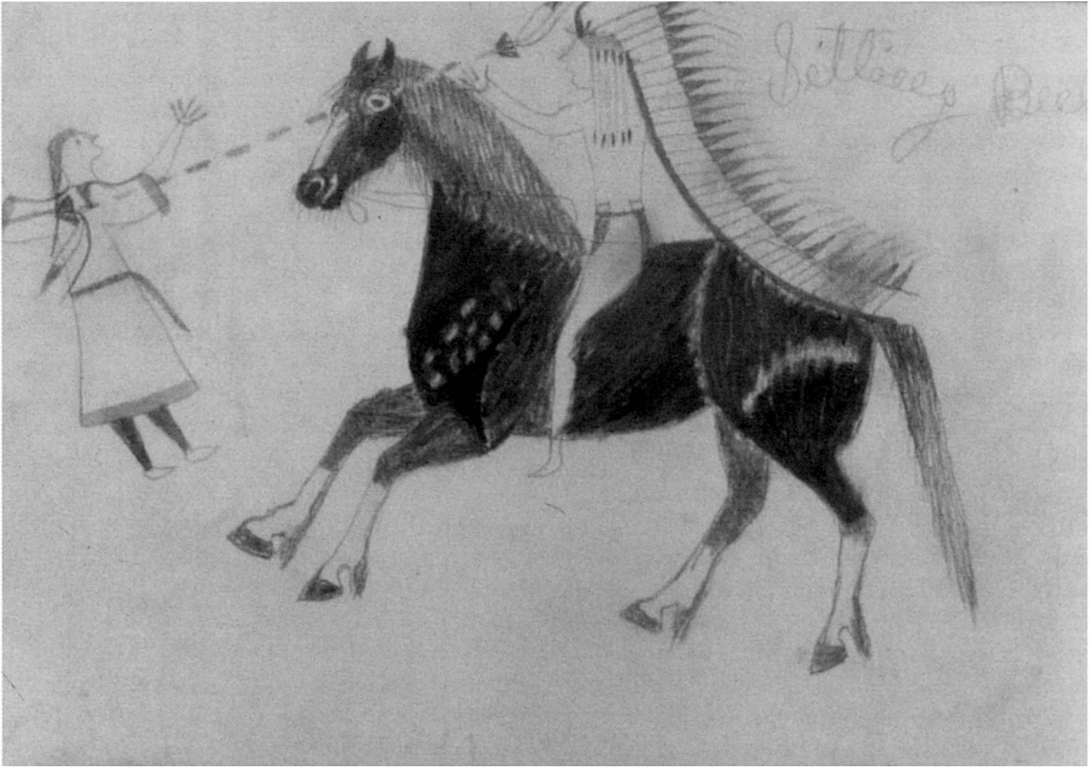


FIG. 13. *Woman Captured by Bull*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

Fight with Assiniboine. Bull takes two prisoners. "Bull" 30 years old. 300 Sioux – 20 Assiniboine – 2 Assiniboine killed – no Sioux killed. On the big fork of the Missouri. Bull took one prisoner, "Jumping Bull" home to Bull's tipi (wigwam) gave him his (Bull's) war bonnet. Jumping Bull's father was a chief. Jumping Bull is now at Standing Rock (Fort Yates, D.T.) with my people. They call him my son.³⁵

As pointed out earlier, during the reservation period, scenes depicting horse captures or white participants disappeared. However, prior victory over whites was portrayed through the use of white cultural items. On the horse, the specific headgear, saddle, or

brand was a conventional means for denoting white manufacture and use, thus implying prior ownership by whites. Depictions of warriors wearing military uniforms, also used to represent prior victory over whites, were most common in later ledger drawings from the north central Plains of the United States.³⁶ In the Smith record, Sitting Bull portrays himself on one occasion in military pants with a red stripe. Such pants were worn by the artillery, and may represent victory over that particular group. However, in ledger pictography overall, the portrayal of Indians wearing these pants is disproportionately large for the number of artillery soldiers that actually served on the Plains.³⁷

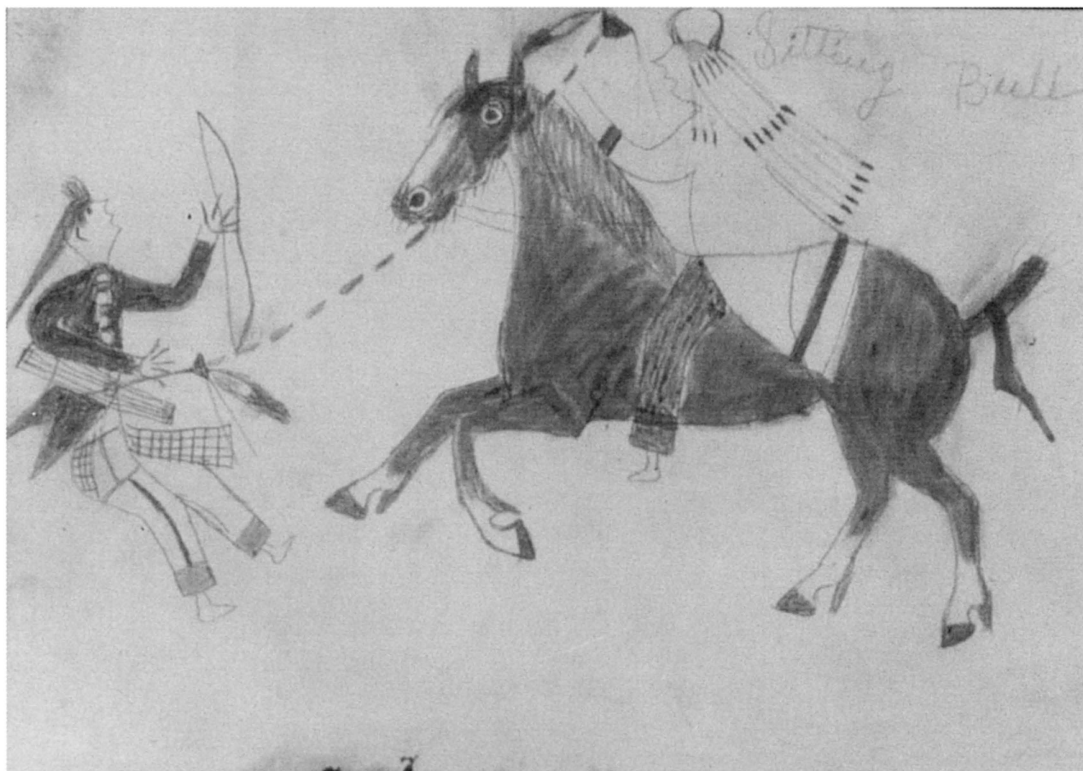


FIG. 14. *Fight with Assiniboine*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

In another entry in the Smith record, Figure 15, Sitting Bull's verbal account makes reference to General Miles and reads strikingly like a self-vindication:

Fight with General Miles scouts and Crow Indians. "Bull" kills Brave Indian, one of General Miles' scouts. About three years ago – the time General Miles was out after the Sioux near the Queen's land (Canada). Brave Indian was way ahead of the soldiers and was following up the Sioux too closely. "Bull" turned and killed Brave Indian. One Cheyenne Indian (scout) also killed. Sioux did not fight soldiers – wanted to get away from soldiers. The scouts and Crows killed five Sioux before they got to

Canada. General Miles' scouts seem to be from every Indian nation. The Sioux run away.³⁸

For the warrior, the way of honor had changed. Sitting Bull left Fort Randall in late April 1883 to join his people at Standing Rock. Due to public complaint about the treatment of Indians on reservations, and shortly after his arrival, a select committee of the senate was sent to Standing Rock to investigate the conditions of the Indian tribes of Montana and Dakota.³⁹ As Sitting Bull stood to address the committee, he waved his hand, and the other Indians left the room. Sitting Bull was left alone with the committee, their interpreter, stenographer, and clerk. Major

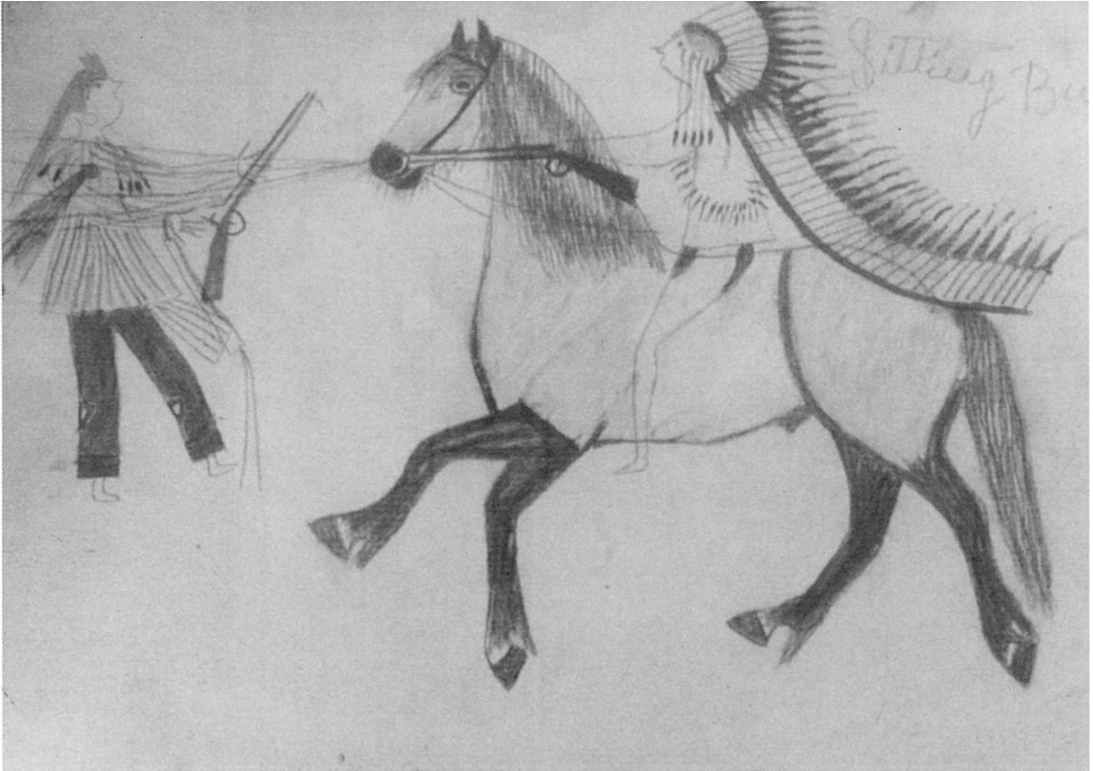


FIG. 15. *General Miles' Scouts*. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

McLaughlin, the Indian agent at Standing Rock, was also present. Sitting Bull asserted his role as leader of his people and began to speak about the conditions under which they were living. The following is taken from the stenographer's notes:

I say I want my country taken care of for me. My children will grow up here and I am looking ahead for their benefit, and for the benefit of my children's children too; and even beyond that. I sit here and look around me now and I see my people starving. . . .

. . . When the grandfather told me to live like his people, I told him to send me six teams of mules, because that is the way white people make a living, and I wanted

my children the Sioux to have these things to help them make a living. I also told him to send me two spans of horses with wagons, and everything else my children would need. I asked for a horse and buggy for my children; I was advised to follow the ways of the white man, and that is why I asked for those things. I never ask for anything that is not needed. I asked for a cow and a bull for each family, so they can raise cattle of their own. I asked for four yokes of oxen and wagons with them. Also a yoke of oxen and a wagon for each of my children to haul wood with. It is your own doing that I am here; you sent me here and advised me to live as you do, and it is not right for me to live in poverty!

. . . I want to tell you that our rations have been reduced to almost nothing, and many of the people have starved to death. Now I beg you to have the amount of our rations increased so that our children will not starve, but will live better than they do now. I want clothing too. Look at the men around here and see how poorly dressed they are. We want some clothing this month, and when it gets cold, we want more to protect us from the weather. That is all I have to say.⁴⁰

Senator John Logan of Illinois, the chair of the committee, responded that Sitting Bull was out of order and was showing the committee disrespect, that he "was not a great chief" and that he had "no following, no power, no control and no right to any control." He then directed Sitting Bull to leave, which he soon did. But first he responded to Mr. Logan:

S.B.: I wish to say a word about my not being a chief, have no authority, am proud, and consider myself a great man in general.
Logan: We do not care to talk with you anymore tonight.

S.B.: I would like to speak. I have grown to be a very independent man, and consider myself a very great man.

Logan: You have made your speech. And we do not have to continue any further.

S.B.: I have just one more word to say. Of course, if a man is a chief, and has authority, he should be proud, and consider himself a great man.⁴¹

With that he left the room.

In government records of the period, the word "chief" was used in a generic sense to indicate any sort of leader.⁴² According to many accounts, both Indian and white, Sitting Bull had gained renown as a warrior in his youth, but his most significant role in later life was as a spiritual leader.⁴³ It was said that he participated in the Sun Dance frequently to emerge with visions of future events that later came to pass. It was the gift of prophecy, in

later life, that earned him honor among his people.⁴⁴

It seems fitting to conclude this essay with a look at Indian picto-narratives that represent Sitting Bull's death. Sitting Bull's final mark on history had to do with the Ghost Dance ceremony. By 1890 the Ghost Dance, which reportedly had begun as a small local ceremony some twenty years earlier, was being practiced across the Plains. To its followers it promised the absence of whites, disease, and poverty and a return of the world of the ancestors.⁴⁵ It seemed a concerted effort toward a return of sacred time. Concurrent with the spread of the dance was a growing epidemic of starvation among the Indians. More than one season of drought had left the Indians lacking food. Then, in April 1890, rations barely at subsistence level were cut in half, and the Indians reportedly were "becoming restless from hunger."⁴⁶

In June 1890 the Indian Affairs office in Washington called for reports of the Ghost Dance from all its agents. In a 17 October letter to the commissioner of Indian Affairs, McLaughlin, the Indian agent at Standing Rock, wrote that "the removal of the malcontents would end all troubles and uneasiness in the future."⁴⁷ He referred to Sitting Bull "the irreconcilable" as "high priest and leading apostle of this latest Indian absurdity."⁴⁸ He further suggested that the entire Ghost Dance practice could be nullified if Sitting Bull and a list of others were removed from "Sioux country" and transported to a distant military prison.⁴⁹ McLaughlin had been asking for Sitting Bull's arrest as early as June, but the military was initially reluctant to get involved. By November, however, they agreed with the agent that Sitting Bull posed a threat as an instigator.⁵⁰

In early December, Sitting Bull sent a request to McLaughlin for permission to leave Standing Rock for Ghost Dance ceremonies at Pine Ridge. Agency informants further reported that Sitting Bull fully intended to go with or without permission, and was making preparations for the journey.⁵¹ Before dawn on

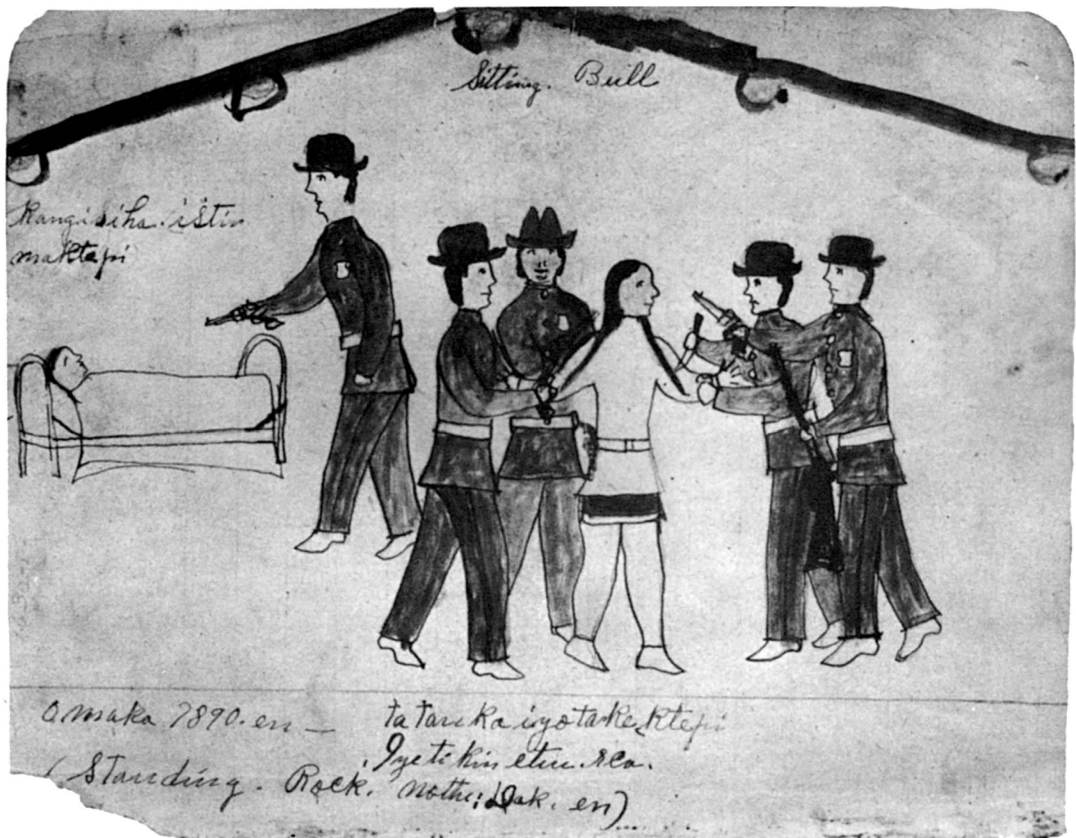


FIG. 16. *The Ghost Dance and the Battle of Wounded Knee*. Reproduced from *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux* by Amos Bad Heart Bull, text by Helen Blish, by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright © 1967 by the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright © renewed 1995 by the University of Nebraska Press.

Sunday, 15 December 1890, McLaughlin sent agency Indian police to Sitting Bull's cabin with orders to place him under arrest.⁵²

By 6 a.m., several policemen had entered Sitting Bull's cabin to arrest him while others stood guard outside. According to government reports, Sitting Bull initially raised no objection and was led to the door flanked by two policemen and followed by another. In the doorway, however, friction occurred. It was reported that he changed his mind for no apparent reason and began resisting, calling for his friends to help him. Gunfire ensued, and Sitting Bull was shot simultaneously in the chest and the back of the head. A total of fourteen were killed, eight of Sitting Bull's

party and six Indian police. Among the dead was Sitting Bull's teenage son, Crowfoot.⁵³

The majority of Lakota winter counts for the year 1890-91 refer to the killing of Sitting Bull, the Ghost Dance, or the killing of Big Foot and his band at Wounded Knee. In addition, between the years 1913 and 1931, at least six other Lakota picto-narratives were produced that portray events surrounding Sitting Bull's death. In Bad Heart Bull's record, six images are devoted to events at Wounded Knee, with a representation of Sitting Bull's death serving as an introduction.⁵⁴ The picture (Fig. 16) shows an interior view of the cabin with Sitting Bull in the doorway. A policeman is shooting Sitting Bull's son, who

still lies in bed, in the head, while others are escorting Sitting Bull through the doorway. The page is titled in English *Sitting Bull*. In the upper left-hand corner, the following is written in Lakota: *Crowfoot was killed in his sleep*. Also in Lakota, immediately beneath the picture, is written *in the winter of 1890, Sitting Bull was killed at his home*. Beneath that, in English, is written *Standing Rock North Dakota*, followed by *en*, meaning "at" or "in."

Four other picto-narratives representing Sitting Bull's death are in the possession of the State Historical Society of North Dakota and the Albuquerque Museum. Two are attributed to Stone Man, a Yanktonai (in North Dakota); and two are attributed to Jaw, a Sans-Arc Hunkpapa (in North Dakota and Albuquerque). Sitting Bull was Hunkpapa.

Stone Man was a member of the Indian police who took part in the incident. Each cloth record is comprised of two scenes, although neither shows the actual moment of Sitting Bull's killing. In the first record, one scene shows police lifting Sitting Bull down a path, and the other shows Crowfoot being shot. In the second record, one scene shows Sitting Bull being escorted from his cabin, and the other his dead body. In both records, the Indian police are drawn in great detail, seemingly outnumbered by Sitting Bull's followers. The theme is one of victorious battle.

The records of Jaw paint quite a different picture. Jaw produced a variety of picto-narratives, including winter counts as well as biographic renditions for Frances Densmore. In his portrayal of events, he also included multiple scenes. In one record, the first shows Sitting Bull's cabin in relation to a ceremonial lodge; the second, his being escorted from the cabin; and the third, his dead body. Most of Sitting Bull's followers are portrayed in Ghost Dance shirts. Both records show the execution of Crowfoot (the one in Albuquerque labels him *Sitting Bull Jr.*) and portray the deaths in relation to the Ghost Dance ceremony.⁵⁵

The events selected for representation in the picto-narratives that characterize the life

of Sitting Bull do not seem random or repetitive; rather, the scenes seem to signify events that correspond to cultural beliefs and norms. In the Kimball record, he represents his first feat as a warrior, an early demonstration of his bravery. The scenes with Jumping Bull, as well as the horse captures, imply his generosity with his own people. In encounters with other Indians, particularly Crow and Arikara, his persistence in the face of longstanding adversaries is shown. At times, the variation in his headgear and clothing seems not to signify any particular societal role but do more to reflect his cleverness in outwitting the opponent.

Sitting Bull was always quite honest about his mistrust of whites. Even after his surrender, he fought for seven years against a treaty that finally broke the Sioux reservation into parts in 1889.⁵⁶ In the picto-narratives, most scenes with whites reflect counting coup, with the whites fleeing. In scenes where whites face him, the verbal notes make direct reference to or imply that the white showed bravery. In encounters with whites, Sitting Bull is either represented as Crow Indian or he appears in a bandana (which could be anyone). Again, this suggests his wit in battle: better not to be identified, but if identified, better to be identified as Crow.

Even in the records after surrender, Sitting Bull in no way represents himself as humbled. The fact that the name glyph shifts from the buffalo bull to the bird of his shield corresponds to his role as counsel and seer in later life. Further, he uses both the picto-narratives and his written signature as a means of providing for his people.

The fact that Sitting Bull's death is recorded in numerous winter counts and a number of other picto-narratives reflects his importance as a leader throughout his life, in all manners: warrior, provider, counselor, spokesperson, seer. The words and picto-narratives of Sitting Bull himself, as well as those of others, shape an image in the western mind that approaches the epic hero, albeit one who lived in historical time.

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