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Introduction:
A Lakota Life

Tatáŋka Íyotake is a Siouxan expression describing a male bison seated upon the prairie while watching over a herd. It translates into the phrase, "Buffalo Bull Who Sits," invoking a force of nature. A number of virtuous attributes—bravery, fortitude, generosity, and wisdom—are suggested by this phrase. The expression also was given as a name to a Lakota Sioux who devoted his life to protecting his people. He became known around the world by the Anglicized name Sitting Bull.[1]

A long time ago, Sitting Bull's ancestors began to occupy the land near the upper Missouri River in North America. Tribal historians preserved an oral tradition to recollect significant occurrences from age to age, as the Indigenous populations generated winter counts for memorialization. The winter count, a kind of pictographic record or calendar, highlighted a major event of a single year, arranging imagery in configurations on animal hides. The first events depicted in the traditional Lakota Sioux winter counts relate to episodes during the late eighteenth century. Although the term "Sioux" eventually became a linguistic appellation that covers a related people amid a vast wilderness, it began as a French corruption of a central Algonquian word that once meant "snake." The name Lakota comes from an autonym for the "united" or "allied" western Sioux, who shared power, knowledge, and language. Also known by the name Teton, they were "dwellers on the prairie." They comprised seven tribal bands of distinct people, or *oyátes*: the Hunkpapa, Oglala, Sicangu [Brulé], Sihasapa [Blackfoot], Miniconjou, Two Kettle, and Sans Arc. Even if they spoke variant Siouxan dialects, they shared a sense of geopolitical identity through the *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ*, or Seven Council Fires.[2]

The Lakota developed identifiable traits associated with the classic buffalo-hunting cultures of the North American Great Plains. A band of extended family groups ranging from 150 to 300 individuals, called *tiospayes*,

or collection of lodges, camped together. Their councils selected an *itancan*, or chief. The traditional male societies assembled the *akicitas*, or warriors, who provided security around campsites and scouted ahead for promising locations for food, water, and shelter. These warriors carried bows and arrows with them almost everywhere they went. The warriors' strategic adaptation of horses and firearms enabled them to extend their foraging excursions toward the setting sun and to broaden a conflict zone to the banks of the Bighorn River. Pushing westward across contested grounds, they confronted Indigenous rivals such as the Kiowa, Omaha, Ponca, Otoe, Flathead, Pawnee, Shoshone, Crow, Hidatsa, Blackfeet, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Mandan, and Arikara. In 1823, they assisted the *wasi'chus*—non-Indian people of western European descent—by raiding Arikara villages along the upper Missouri. Their mobility was a tactical asset and made them less susceptible to the outbreaks of disease that decimated so many of the other Native Americans following the arrival of the *wasi'chus* on this continent. While organizing a suzerainty in their section, the nomadic folk saw little reason to fear the existence of the US government. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Lakota population had grown to as many as fifteen thousand. As long as millions of bison roamed the inland steppes of the occupied territories, the vernacular space of the "Buffalo Nation" sustained grand communal hunts for game.[3]

Emergence

"I was born on the Missouri River," stated Sitting Bull to a journalist later in life, although the exact location and precise date of his birth remain indefinite.[4] Most biographers point to 1831, which slightly predates a magnificent meteor shower that indexed multiple Lakota winter counts. His father bore the name Sitting Bull at the time of his birth, and he was given the name Jumping Badger. His mother, Her Holy Door, raised him in a tipi along with his three sisters—one older named Good Feather Woman and two younger named Twin Woman and Brown Shawl Woman. The beloved child survived a bout with smallpox, which left minor scarring on his face. Steadfast, vigilant, and deliberative, he acquired the nickname *Hunkesni*,

which meant Slow. His boyhood talents included an uncanny ability to listen attentively to the sounds of animals, especially birds. As both a participant and an observer, he enjoyed the songs, dances, and artistry common to the *hochoka*, or camp circle. Educated by two uncles, Four Horns and Looks-for-Him-in-a-Tent, he was considered a gifted athlete. He strove to excel at footraces. He also earned applause in a popular hoop game, a team sport involving sticks used for the purpose of rolling objects across an open field. His teachers demanded long hours on horseback to develop the martial skills necessary for navigating the prairies. His peers called him Sacred Standshot. He demonstrated exceptional prowess with the bow and arrow, killing his first buffalo by the time he was ten years old.[5]

As preparation for the responsibilities of adulthood, the *hanblecheyapi*, or vision quest, was a pivotal event in the life of a Lakota youth. With the aid of a spiritual advisor, a young man would retire, alone, to some quiet spot away from the lodges to endure fasting, meditation, and sleeplessness. Only the worthy would experience a revelatory dream. The dreaming state liberated the imagination from ordinary space and time, eliminating the perceptual boundaries between the visible and invisible worlds. If a divine spirit revealed itself during the brief seclusion, it would become an invaluable guide on the road of life. A neophyte experienced the "crying for a vision" as a rite of passage, although a vision's meaning was highly subjective, representing a confidential matter between an individual and his advisor. As a teenager, Jumping Badger dreamed about marvelous birds watching over him from trees and hilltops. Later, painting his face with lightning, he may have sensed the spiritual calling of a *heyoka*—a strange and wondrous human being summoned to a glorious purpose by the thunderbird, a mythological winged creature. A thunderbird dreamer belonged to an exclusive fraternity, whose actions seemed inexplicable to the uninitiated observer. They were foremost among a camp's guardians and known for their fearlessness in the face of danger. They protected friends and family from emerging threats and prepared to sacrifice themselves in battle without a second thought.[6]

The elder Sitting Bull's only son experienced his first battle around the age of fourteen. He bravely counted his first coup, which was a warrior's way of winning prestige by striking or touching an enemy during combat. After earning a white feather during a furious fight with the Crow

Indians, he received the name Sitting Bull as a gift from his proud father, who thereafter became known as Jumping Bull. His father also gave him a sacred shield decorated with a dark birdlike creature in the center of a blue-green field. He also received a long lance with an eight-inch notched iron blade. After a subsequent clash with the Flathead Indians, he earned a red feather for suffering his first wound. A second wound, received during another skirmish with the Crow, caused a limp that remained apparent as he matured. He was initiated into the Strong Hearts, Kit Fox, and Buffalo societies, which conferred their exclusive honors upon the most respected.[7]

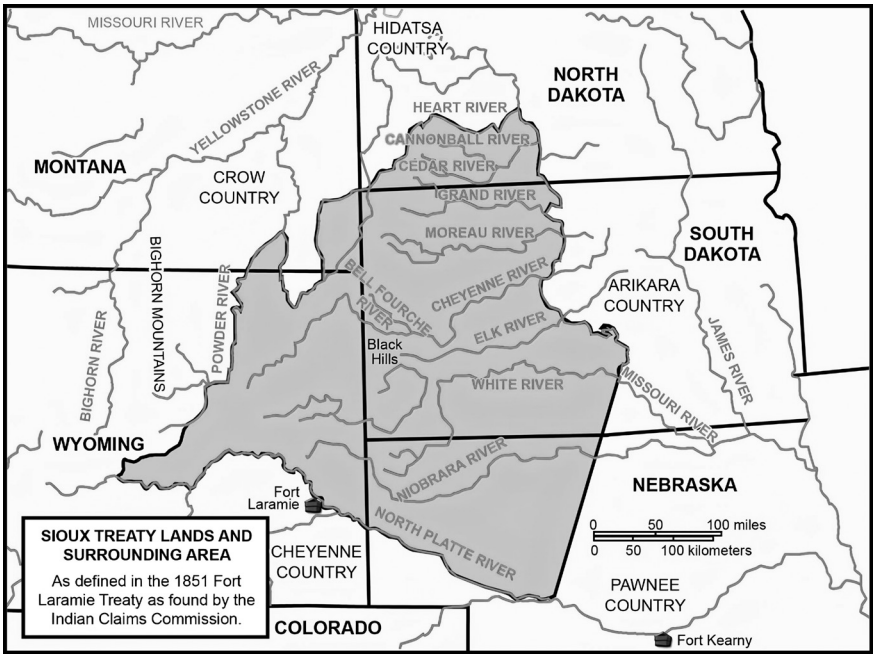
Though the Hunkpapa band shaped his daily life, little is known about the personal affairs of the young Sitting Bull. His first wife, Light Hair, whom he married in 1851, died in 1857. His first son died a short time later. He married at least two additional wives, Scarlet Woman and Snow on Hair. Consequently, he shared his lodge with as many as nine different wives over the course of his adult years. He parented a number of biological children, including two daughters, Many Horses and Standing Holy, and a son, Crow Foot. He raised a nephew, One Bull, much as a son, assuming responsibility for his instruction just as Four Horns and Looks-for-Him-in-a-Tent had educated him. Another nephew, White Bull, grew close to him on the warpath. He sustained an abiding friendship with his cousin Black Moon. Sitting Bull's father died in 1859 as the result of a stab wound received during an intertribal battle. Sitting Bull's adopted brother *Hohe*, originally called Little Assiniboine, then took the name Jumping Bull. Sitting Bull's widowed mother remained a guiding light around the tipi, staying within his inner circle until her death in 1884.[8]

Standing five feet, ten inches in height, Sitting Bull rose to prominence in the Lakota's cultural world. He possessed a muscular frame, broad shoulders, and long hair, but it was his reputation for "making medicine" that inspired many to follow him. His dark brown eyes observed what could not be seen in the uncertainties of the wide, open spaces. With a spiritual mindset, he endeavored to solve chronic problems such as insecurity, sickness, thirst, and hunger. His understanding of an interconnected cosmos imparted knowledge and power through constant communication with *Wakantanka*—the Great Mysterious One or the Great Spirit. He believed that an all-embracing, life-giving energy strengthened every form of existence, and he sensed its manifestations in the sky, wind, rain, rocks,

streams, and trees. He focused his intellect on the sacred gifts of a paternal Sun and a maternal Earth. He recognized the vital importance of the bison ecology, which offered meat for food, hides for clothing and shelter, and countless items for daily use. His vocabulary suggested equivalencies with religious orthodoxies and articulated an appreciation of the incomprehensible forces that made him a *wichásha wakán*, or holy man. He carried a *wotawe*, a medicine bundle containing a small white stone, human hair rolled into little balls, and bits of wood and shell. He became well-known for his charms, prophecies, and prayerfulness. Undoubtedly, he embodied the four cardinal virtues of the Lakota: bravery, fortitude, generosity, and wisdom. "I was never afraid of my enemies," he declared, for "my successes I owe the Great Spirit."[9]

Sitting Bull played a conspicuous role in the *wiwáŋyaŋg wachipi*, or sun dances, annual outpourings of spiritual devotion among the Lakota. The otherwise independent *oyátes* prepared each year for the communal hunts by fulfilling personal vows of ceremonial self-sacrifice. With the scattered bands coming together in summer, the *wiwáŋyaŋg wachipi* rekindled a collaborative ethos with festivities, feasting, and frolics. The dances lasted up to six days and were held in an outdoor arena. For a *wichásha wakán*, these rituals typically involved pantomiming, fasting, meditating, and gazing upward at the blazing orb in the sky. Inserting skewers through their skin, the participants moved around a "medicine pole" and strained to break free. The scars on Sitting Bull's chest, back, and arms testified of the physical pain while sun dancing.[10]

One of the most important touchstones of Sitting Bull's belief system was the sacredness of the *Pahá Sápa*, or Black Hills. This singular, isolated mountain range loomed large on the horizon with rugged granite spires crowning its peaks. It towered some four thousand feet skyward over prairie grasses, pine trees, and spring-fed waters. It encompassed an area over a hundred miles long and almost fifty miles wide. Its ridges, curves, and recesses evoked the form of a reclining female body, or so hunters and gatherers observed. It was said that the first buffalo emerged from a cavern, which opened at the base of the *Pahá Sápa*. *Iktomi*, a spider-trickster spirit and shape-shifting hero of Lakota folklore, purportedly invited the original human beings to follow the buffalo's passageway to the mountain meadows. To Sitting Bull and his people, the Black Hills became a site of



Map, Treaty of Fort Laramie, 1851.

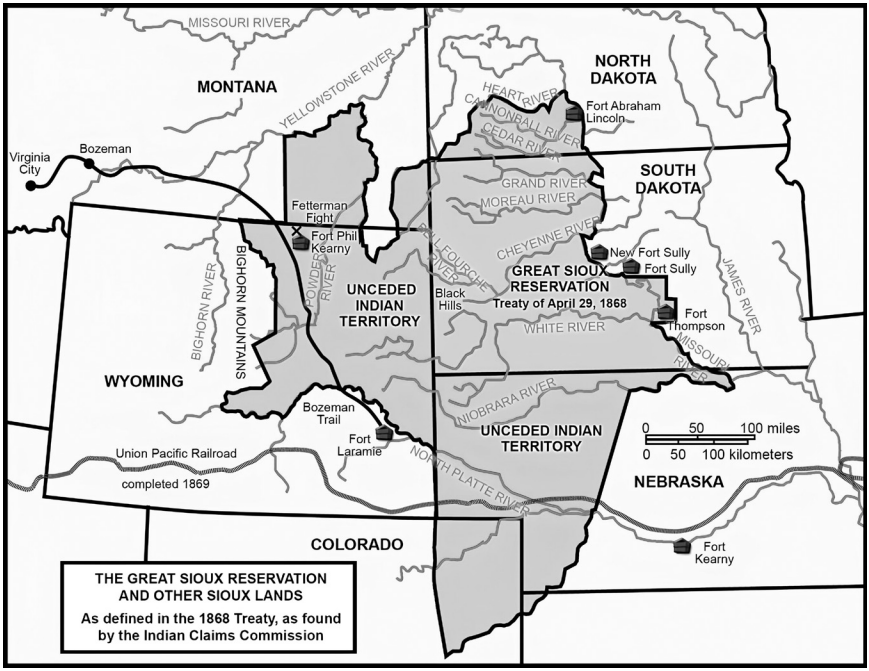
transcendence, representing the heart of everything that sustains life on the northern Great Plains.[11]

Preferring to remain close to the Black Hills, Sitting Bull stayed away from the remote military outposts being built by the *wasi'chus*. He ignored the treaty council held between Plains Indians and governmental authorities near Fort Laramie, which granted the United States permission to build roads and forts in the interior borderlands. Also called the Horse Creek Treaty, this first Fort Laramie Treaty was signed on September 17, 1851. Though the US government recognized tribal territorial claims, Sitting Bull considered the treaty's provisions irrelevant. Following the Dakota War of 1862 in Minnesota, he noticed Siouxan refugees relocating westward. At his northernmost camps, lodged along the upper Missouri—where some Lakota traded furs with the Chouteau Company at Fort Pierre—he encountered US soldiers on maneuvers around Fort Berthold. On July 28, 1864, he fought against the bluecoats in the Battle of Killdeer Mountain. He frustrated opponents in skirmishes at Dead Buffalo Lake and in the Badlands.

Multiple war parties annoyed the "soldier houses" of Fort Stevenson, Fort Totten, Fort Rice, and Fort Buford, even if he avoided set-piece actions. The "Long Knives"—non-Indian invaders—did not fight like traditional enemies, he observed, but campaigned in massive formations across contested ground and utilized the firepower of field artillery known as "thunder iron." Of course, he preferred hit-and-run tactics. When a Hunkpapa village held a non-Indian female named Fanny Kelly, seized during an Oglala raid, Sitting Bull insisted that she be returned safely to Fort Sully. He received another wound in battle when a ball from a revolver struck him in the left hip and exited out the small of his back. He healed quickly, even as his widowed mother counseled him against taking too many risks.[12]

In light of all this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Sitting Bull's reputation for acts of valor began to spread far and wide. One Lakota winter count identifies the "first fight with white men," depicting him battling a US soldier between 1864 and 1865. Generally unconcerned with the US Civil War, Plains Indians tended to focus their attention on military outfits around the "Great American Desert." A few glyphs feature flags that commemorate formal conferences with US commissioners, although Sitting Bull boasted that he never signed any accords with those "taking lands."[13]

Signed by Lakota representatives and US commissioners on July 2, 1868, the second Fort Laramie Treaty ended the belligerence of Red Cloud, an Oglala Lakota chief. While arranging peace "between the parties to this agreement," this treaty established the Great Sioux Reservation in the Dakota Territory. The 48,000 square miles encompassed the White, Bad, Cheyenne, Moreau, and Grand Rivers as well as the Black Hills. Granting the Lakota a substantial realm that extended about two hundred miles from south to north, the treaty secured for them "absolute and undisturbed use and occupation" of the land. Vague references to railroad rights-of-way left the door open for future infrastructure projects but did not explain the devilish details. The treaty closed the Bozeman Trail, an overland route in the Montana Territory, and military outposts were abandoned. The legalisms of the treaty's seventeen articles placed constraints upon the Lakota, or so officials in Washington DC assumed. Nevertheless, Article 11 recognized hunting rights for the Lakota as far south as the Republican River. Its language reserved the right to "hunt on any lands north of the North Platte River and on the Republican Fork of the Smoky Hill River," so long as the bison herds ranged thereon "in such



Map, Treaty of Fort Laramie, 1868.

numbers as to justify the chase." According to Article 16, the lands north of the North Platte River and eastward from the summits of the Big Horn Mountains remained "unceded Indian territory." Henceforth, "no white person or persons" would be permitted to settle upon or to occupy any portion of it without Lakota approval. The US government promised financial payments to the Lakota for the building of potential roads and pledged that no future agreement for land cessions would be considered valid unless executed and signed by "at least three-fourths of the adult male Indians."[14]

As the Lakota carried out vendettas against the Crow Indians and other rivals, US citizens boosted plans for the development of transcontinental railroads across the country. In 1868, Ulysses S. Grant, a former US Army officer known for his successful campaigns in the Civil War, won the presidential election and took office in Washington DC the following year. He openly courted the public service of humanitarian reformers, who decried the wars of Indian extermination and extolled the morality of the "white

man's road." Despite the stated purpose of bureaucratic initiatives, defending Indian rights remained secondary to economic interests. Non-Indian homesteaders, ranchers, and miners pushed further and further westward even as tribal groups supposedly held the "reserved" lands, usually defined by shifting boundaries as established in a plethora of treaties with congressional approval. Leaders such as Red Cloud made numerous trips to and from the national capital, urging governmental authorities to fulfill their obligations. Obviously, the reservation system—and the reduction of freedom under it—was not what the Indigenous populations of the North American grasslands wanted. Throughout the Reconstruction era, the "peace policy" of the Grant administration would lead to sharp wars between US soldiers and the Plains Indians.[15]

Meanwhile, Sitting Bull acted as a *blotáhunka*, or war chief, guarding the Lakota's terrain. By the end of the 1860s, he had counted sixty-three coups in martial feats that bested foes. His calm temperament diffused tensions at tribal councils, for he often sat quietly, rehearsing in his mind what he would say or do before proceeding. His uncompromising repudiation of the *wasi'chus* resonated with the belligerent voices, who wanted to hunt without external constraints and desired to avoid dependency on the US government. His uncle Four Horns, a ranking Hunkpapa chieftain, encouraged Sitting Bull to seek an innovative leadership position in an era of political instability. "When you tell us to fight, we will raise up our weapons," proclaimed the Shirt Wearer to Sitting Bull, "and if you tell us to make peace, we will lay down our weapons." The elevation of Sitting Bull to higher authority may have been temporary, for it depended on the willingness of non-treaty factions to abide by their pledges of loyalty. In a grand ceremony, he was carried into a large circle on a buffalo robe and crowned with a magnificent headdress. An enthusiastic crowd applauded the anointment of a *wakicunza*, or honored administrator, who sought to unite the separate clans and diverse bands for action. There was no precedent for this kind of senior executive role, which exalted unity of command. Sitting Bull's supporters heralded him as the "Supreme Chief of the whole Sioux Nation," even if this was an exaggeration. His critics considered him a great pretender since he was not a hereditary figurehead. Though not supported by everyone, he exerted broader influence than had any other Lakota before him.[16]

Battleground

The bison herds drew many Lakota to the far western stretches of the upper Missouri, where Sitting Bull solidified his leadership during the early 1870s. He remained an advocate for self-sufficiency on the northern Great Plains, and his camp attracted a wide following from the discontented souls seeking both sustenance and security. For example, he befriended Frank Grouard, a former captive with mixed Polynesian ancestry. Intertribal warfare remained a popular pastime, and another wounding earned him an additional red feather. His raids even targeted caravans of roving Canadian Métis traders, often denigrated as the Slota, or "greasy ones," who crisscrossed the interior borderlands to exchange rifles and ammunition for buffalo hides. Always camping a safe distance from the columns of US soldiers, he recognized that the changes in the land made it difficult to get "something to eat." He sent His Horse Looking, the husband of a younger sister, to Fort Peck, instructing his brother-in-law to seek out "a white man who would tell the truth" and promising to visit if one could be found. He would not commit to going to Washington DC and avoided meeting with the temporizing envoys of the "Great Father," or the US president. His camp accepted rations for the first time but continued to depend on foraging. Whether or not peace was attainable, he wanted to make the Powder River country into a game reserve for the Lakota.[17]

Events along the Yellowstone River, which the Lakota called the Elk River, attracted the attention of Sitting Bull. He observed the disruptive activities of the "rail road people" in 1872 and sent word through an emissary to Colonel David S. Stanley that any invasion of the hunting grounds would be met by force. He consulted the Silent Eaters, a secret group amid the Strong Hearts that gathered at midnight to achieve consensus for strategic planning and tactical coordination. He mobilized a cadre of equestrians known as the White Horse Riders, who came to be called "Sitting Bull's soldiers." In the valley of the Yellowstone, surveyor teams and military escorts for the Northern Pacific Railway endured a concerted strike led by Sitting Bull himself. A stunning display of his audacity occurred on August 14, 1872, when the Lakota tangled with Major Eugene M. Baker's command in the Battle of Arrow Creek. In the midst of a gunfire exchange, Sitting Bull strolled down range and sat on the ground in front of the bluecoats. Inviting

comrades to join him in the danger zone, he proceeded to enjoy a leisurely smoke of tobacco in the range of sharpshooters—all the while ignoring the hail of bullets whizzing by his head. After puffing on his pipe, he cleaned it and then walked off the line, unfazed by the chaos around him. White Bull, his nephew and fellow smoker, called it "the bravest deed possible." Once the construction of the Northern Pacific Railway foundered, the financial empire of Jay Cooke and Company collapsed in bankruptcy a year later.[18]

As a result of sensational press releases from the US Army's Expedition of 1874, close to fifteen thousand migrants swarmed the Black Hills to search for gold. The next year, Sitting Bull vowed to defend what he called the Lakota "food pack"—the Black Hills—from the trespassers. His supporters tried to shut down the "thieves' road," a trail that cut through the Great Sioux Reservation. To intimidate gold-diggers in their midst, mounted Indian warriors took to yelling, "Sitting Bull, I am he!" President Grant, who contemplated ways to "extinguish Indian title" to the mineral resources in the Black Hills, huddled with the military brass and deskbound bureaucrats in the White House. Following the Indian Appropriations Act of 1871, the legislative branch prohibited new treaties with tribal groups. While the rations and annuities from the agencies were placed on hold, officials in Washington DC no longer abided by the Fort Laramie Treaty. They demanded that the Lakota sell the Black Hills, cease camping off the reservation, and prepare to relocate to Indian Territory within the southern Great Plains. The US government and its surrogates announced that any cohorts not residing within reservation boundaries by January 31, 1876, would be considered "hostile."[19]

After receiving reports of depredations committed by the Plains Indians, the War Department prepared the armed forces for imminent hostilities. Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, formulated a plan to use three converging columns to drive the roaming bands into confinement. One column, led by Brigadier General George Crook, moved northward from Fort Fetterman in present-day Wyoming. Under Colonel John Gibbon, another column headed eastward from western Montana. The third column, commanded by Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, marched westward from Fort Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory. Surrounded on all sides, Lakota families living off the reservation had nowhere to turn without facing US soldiers. General Sheridan anticipated a quick victory during the centennial campaign, but

logistical problems postponed most of the overland movements until the spring and summer months.[20]

Thus began the Great Sioux War of 1876, which General Sheridan once called "Sitting Bull's War."[21] The lethality of Sitting Bull was renowned all over the countryside, where tribal groups attempted to organize a wartime coalition against the United States. Sitting Bull sent messengers to the circles of camps scattered up and down the Missouri, asking kinsmen to join him in the hunting grounds. As men, women, and children abandoned the agencies and sought their sustenance near the Powder River, his encampment offered food, water, and shelter to many that spring. From May 21 to May 24, he communed with the Great Spirit from the heights of a butte along Rosebud Creek. After meditating atop a moss-covered rock, he experienced a "terrible dream" about a dust storm propelled by a threatening gale from the east. He envisioned uniformed invaders advancing overland, their weaponry, accoutrements, and trimmings visible in the sunlight. When the approaching tempest crashed into a white cloud, thunder rolled, lightning cracked, and rains poured. Nothing was left of the dust storm; the threat disappeared from sight. The front drifted serenely to the east and to the north. Thereafter, the clear skies indicated to Sitting Bull that the Plains Indians would survive the onslaught from the US Army. "If you do this for me," Sitting Bull pleaded to *Wakantanka* on the multitude's behalf, "I will sun dance two days and nights and will give you a whole buffalo."[22]

In the Montana Territory, thousands of brave companions joined Sitting Bull for a sun dance below the mouth of Muddy Creek. Following purification in a sweat lodge on June 6, he entered the dance circle and performed a pipe ceremony. His associates cut his arms at least a hundred times, gouging tiny pieces of flesh from his body. He danced around the "medicine pole," staring intently into the blazing orb overhead. After half an hour, as blood oozed from the gashes on his skin, he received a new vision. Looking upward with highly attuned senses, he saw bluecoats, as "numerous as grasshoppers" on horseback, riding upside down as they descended on a Plains Indian village. With their feet pointing to the heavens, the soldiers' hats fell toward the Earth. A chilling voice from beyond proclaimed: "These soldiers do not possess ears. They are to die, but you are not supposed to take their spoils." Sitting Bull, who heard the warning loud and clear, readied the campers for a major battle in the offing.[23]

Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho communities—as many as seven thousand people—took sanctuary in the valley of the Little Bighorn River, although they called the area the Greasy Grass. Their sense of solidarity brought a determination to confront the three converging columns of the US Army. On June 17, their war parties stymied General Crook's column in the Battle of the Rosebud, forcing the regiments to return to a base camp at the Tongue River. At the behest of General Terry, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer of the Seventh Cavalry located the Little Bighorn lodges with the assistance of Crow and Arikara scouts. On June 25, Custer, a well-known Civil War veteran casually nicknamed "Long Hair" by the Plains Indians, maneuvered into an attack position above the encampment. With the sounds of war cries in the air, his reconnaissance in force turned into a bloody disaster. He died near a hilltop, where Sitting Bull earlier had honored the Great Spirit with an offering of a buffalo robe and tobacco bundles. The non-Indians called this encounter "Custer's Last Stand." Elsewhere along the ridgeline, a handful of shattered US companies survived on a high bluff. Outnumbered more than three to one, 268 men with Custer's detachment died in the clash. The combined losses among the Plains Indians numbered far less with perhaps thirty-one killed in action. In what came to be known as the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the US Army suffered its worst defeat of the Plains Indian wars.[24]

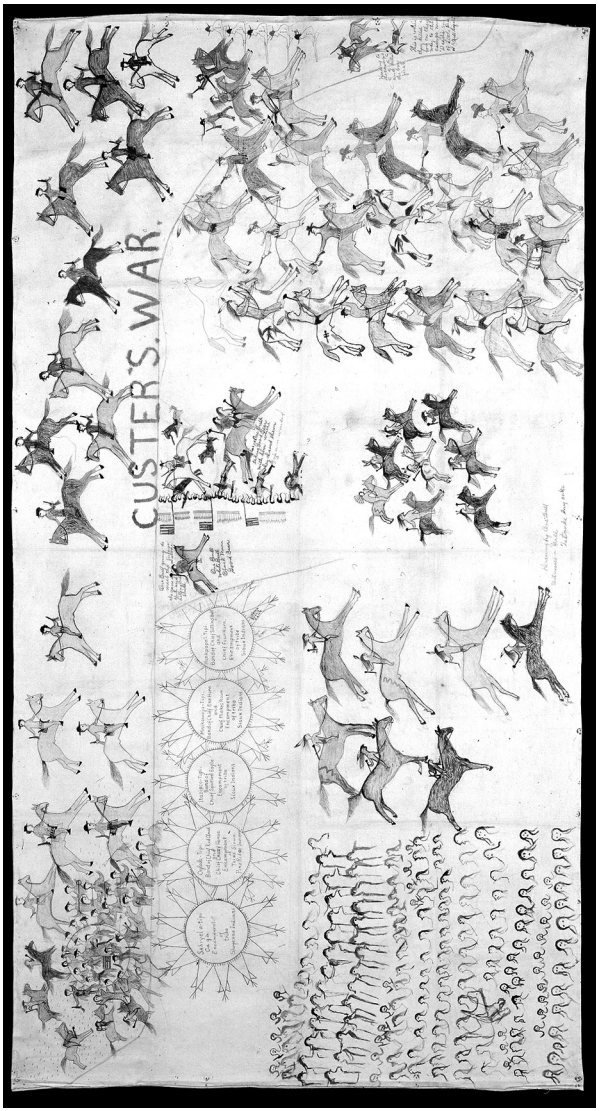
Amid the dust and noise in the Little Bighorn valley, Sitting Bull exited the battlefield within hours. The women, children, and elderly of the encampment needed his help, and he saved these noncombatants by leading them farther west into the Big Horn Mountains. Still recovering from the sun dance, he focused his energies on protecting the camp's most vulnerable from Custer's sudden attack. While pandemonium erupted, he gave commands to the defenders assembling from the flats to the ravines. "Brave up, boys," he repeated upon hearing the roar of gunfire, "it will be a hard time." The unsung heroes in combat were younger men, most of whom battled the Long Knives in cohesive teams. The personal example of Crazy Horse, an Oglala leader, inspired scores to enter the fray while shouting: "*Hóka hé!*"—"Let's go!" Gall, one of Sitting Bull's adopted younger brothers, led Hunkpapa charges along the banks of the river. White Bull, the son of Sitting Bull's sister, also distinguished himself. They fought with Winchester, Henry, and Spencer repeating rifles as well as bows and arrows.

Their sweeping, circling maneuvers on horseback thwarted Custer's risky approach and overwhelmed the frantic men in uniform. Disadvantaged by their inferior numbers, the thin blue line fell apart under pressure. The victors departed the area on June 26, shortly before General Terry's reinforcements arrived.[25]

Ostensibly, Sitting Bull's insight into Custer's military objectives influenced his warrior's countermeasures. Though Sitting Bull never physically entered the fight, eyewitnesses saw him "sort of directing things" from the edge of the battlefield. He handed his sacred shield to One Bull, who carried it on his shoulder while riding his horse through the gun smoke. "Everything happened so quickly," Sitting Bull's nephew later recalled. Blood from a wounded comrade covered most of One Bull's body, but no bullet struck him during his daring ride. He returned to his uncle's side unharmed, observing firsthand that "the Indians and the soldiers were all lying mixed up all over the ground."[26] Although burial scaffolds and other markers adorned the bottomlands the day after, the sounds of wailing faded from the Greasy Grass.

America's telegraph offices and printing presses disseminated the breaking news of the "Custer Massacre," casting a pall over the centennial celebrations of 1876. The *New York Herald* referred to "the Napoleonic tactics and strategy of Sitting Bull." The *Chicago Daily Tribune* cited a Missouri steamboat captain, who claimed Sitting Bull was a Francophonic scholar of Napoleon Bonaparte. Noting the rumors spreading among military cadets, the *Baltimore Gazette* dubbed Sitting Bull "the Sioux West Pointer." A two-part forgery titled *The Works of Sitting Bull* included stanzas from contrived poetry in Greek, French, Spanish, English, Italian, German, and Latin. Published reports repeated falsehoods and hoaxes to rationalize the incredible turn of events.[27]

After learning of the stunning loss at the Little Bighorn, General Sheridan ordered 2,500 additional soldiers westward for a grand military march of retribution. "Custer's Avengers" deployed in heavy formations, as the rank and file prepared to deliver "stern punishment" to the nomadic folk unwilling to capitulate. US Army officers took command of the agencies and began dismounting, disarming, and detaining the Plains Indians. The US Congress disregarded the guarantees of the Fort Laramie Treaty, amending an appropriations bill to demand the formal cession of the Black



Custer's War, c. 1900, Tȟatȟáŋka Waŋžíla (Henry Oscar One Bull).

Hills. Sitting Bull, however, refused to accept the outcome and confronted General Crook's command at Slim Buttes on September 9, 1876. To sustain military operations in these remote areas, the War Department authorized a cantonment at the junction of the Tongue and Yellowstone Rivers. On October 20, 1876, Colonel Nelson A. Miles, whom the Plains Indians called "Man with the Bear Coat," led the Fifth Infantry to Cedar Creek. Month after month Miles's well-supplied winter campaign made relentless progress, even when a blizzard engulfed the trails in every direction.[28] As the infantrymen marched across the windswept prairies, they would sing:

> We're marching off for Sitting Bull!
> And this is the way we go—
> Forty miles a day, on beans and hay,
> With the regular army, O![29]

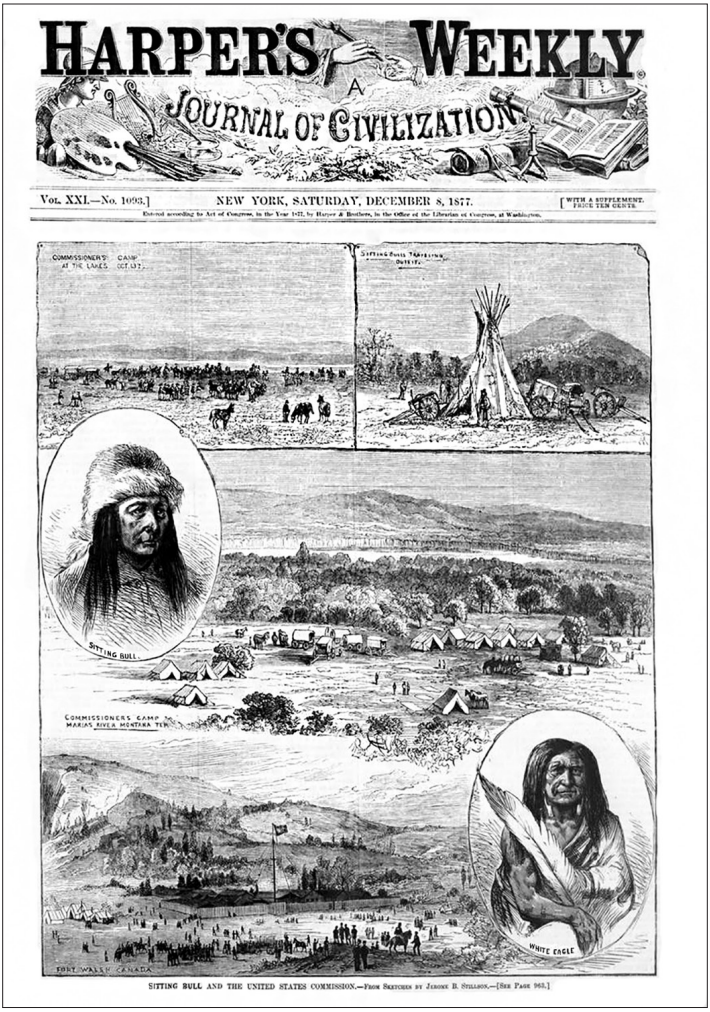
As the wartime coalition of the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho unraveled, Sitting Bull recognized that the armed forces would eventually run him down. He scrambled along the Redwater River, a tributary of the upper Missouri, staying one step ahead of the pursuing columns. An intense engagement occurred at the Wolf Mountains on January 8, 1877, marking the last conventional battle of "Sitting Bull's War."[30]

Border Crossings

The United States organized a new commission to deliver an ultimatum to the Lakota Sioux: "Sell or starve." The Grant administration tapped George W. Manypenny, a former commissioner of Indian Affairs, to lead the drive to finalize an agreement with the agency headmen. The Great Father promised to provide rations and assistance until the Plains Indians became self-supporting. Perhaps unsurprisingly, no one bothered to obtain the number of legal signatures required under the Fort Laramie Treaty. On February 28, 1877, the US Congress officially ratified the agreement to take away the Black Hills and millions of acres from the Great Sioux Reservation.[31]

"We have two ways to go now," Sitting Bull announced to acolytes still following him, "to the land of the Grandmother (Canada) or to the land of the Spaniards (Mexico)."[32] Lakota war parties melted away, as desperate bands straggled into the agencies of the Dakota Territory. "Hang-Around-the-Fort" chiefs became hostages, held by the US Army officers in order to coerce their dependents into complying with federal mandates. On May 7, 1877, Crazy Horse and hundreds of fugitives surrendered at Camp Robinson in Nebraska. First held as a prisoner of war, the Oglala warrior was later killed, bayonetted in the back by guards during a scuffle. Elsewhere, military commands hired squads of Indian scouts to guide detachments through the Missouri bottoms. "Damn soldiers everywhere" became the Lakota lament on the run. While thousands of anxious souls resolved to cross the 49th parallel that marked the northern boundary of the United States, Sitting Bull tarried near the Big Bend of the Milk River. With the arrival of the warmer, longer days of spring, he eventually joined the exodus of refugees heading northward. They trekked along the *canku wakán*—a holy road—to seek sanctuary across the international border.[33]

Sitting Bull's wayfarers entered the "Grandmother's Land"—an allusion to the Dominion of Canada under British Queen Victoria. They journeyed along the White Mud River, but the loss of their ancestral homeland left many demoralized. Famine, illness, and grief stalked the makeshift lodgings of the exiles near Frenchman's Creek. The North-West Mounted Police, especially Major James M. Walsh, monitored the refugee camps on behalf of the territorial government. The influx of migrants prompted an exchange of diplomatic notes between Ottawa, London, and Washington DC. News spread that US President Rutherford B. Hayes and his cabinet conspired to arrange their shipment to Florida or to Indian Territory. At the direction of the Hayes administration, General Terry traveled north with US commissioners to offer pardons and amnesty to the holdouts. On October 17, 1877, a council was held in a large room at Fort Walsh. The angry Americans insisted that Sitting Bull must cease his "rambling mode of life," surrender all horses and weapons, become a cattle rancher, and live at an agency in the United States. He defiantly rejected their demands. One winter count calls this the "Year Sitting Bull Made Peace with the Englishman" and illustrates his hearty handshake with a friendly redcoat.[34]



Front Page, *Harper's Weekly*, December 8, 1877.

Though now a stranger in a strange place, Sitting Bull still lived free. He gazed upon the bison herds ranging near the grassy knolls of the Cypress Hills and the western flank of Wood Mountain. However, the game in the vicinity was insufficient to feed the roughly four thousand mouths in the refugee camps. The harsh weather exacerbated a mood of quiet desperation, yet the atmosphere in Canada remained congenial. "I am looking to

the north for my life," Sitting Bull announced to Major Walsh in another council, for he expected the Mounties to keep the bluecoats at bay. Sitting Bull's campsite became a magnet for individuals often dismissed as "outlaws" fleeing the deplorable conditions of the reservation system. He welcomed a band of Nez Percé Indians, who eluded the US Army by crossing the international border. Colonel Miles chased one of Sitting Bull's hunting parties back to Fort Walsh, dispatching Crow auxiliaries to intercept them close to the Big Bend of the Milk River. Sitting Bull himself killed Magpie, a mounted Crow, in a dramatic duel on horseback. Despite Sitting Bull's association with incursions, Lakota animosity to the United States seemed to wane.[35]

On the southern side of the 49th parallel, the US government permitted the wholesale slaughter of the North American buffalo. Before the Great Sioux War millions of bison grazed the inland steppes; a decade later their numbers had plummeted to only a few thousand. Railways, soldiers, sportsmen, skinners, ranchers, homesteaders, and diseases dramatically reduced the herds, bringing the animals to the brink of extinction. The efficiency of new hunting technology and techniques increased the kill rates. Although the meat often rotted on the wasted carcasses of bison killed by the *wasi'chus*, the bones were ground into fertilizer for agricultural use. The mass shipment of Great Plains buffalo hides to industrial cities around the globe contributed to the terminal decline of a literal and figurative resource. The US Congress voted to appropriate funding for the first national park, Yellowstone, even if governmental efforts to save the buffalo rarely kept up the pace.[36]

Canadian authorities began to call upon the last of the free Lakota to return to the United States. The government denied Sitting Bull's requests for aid on behalf of the hungry and sick. He watched the bison herds dwindle and the refugee camps slowly disintegrate. His distrust of the Long Knives—and, perhaps, his need to reach consensus among his people before committing to any particular plan of action—delayed a final return to the other side of the "holy line." Nightmares of prison bars, iron chains, and hanging gallows disturbed him for months as he prepared to lay down his life eventually. However bleak his future, he decided to risk possible execution so that the destitute might live on the Great Sioux Reservation. He joined with over forty families and journeyed southward to Fort Buford

in the Montana Territory. On July 20, 1881, he directed his son Crow Foot to hand a loaded Winchester to the US Army officer in command. After making the gesture, he spoke: "I wish to be remembered as the last man of my tribe to surrender my rifle." Suffering an eye infection, he wore a pair of goggles while undertaking a short trip aboard a downriver steamer named the *General Sherman*. As a symbol of peacefulness, he carried a three-and-a-half-foot long pipe. On a brief stop, he toured the territorial town of Bismarck before continuing the boat ride to Fort Yates. The assassination of US President James A. Garfield and the murder of Sicangu Chief Spotted Tail came to his attention. He dreaded his own fate. Word-of-mouth promises of amnesty and pardons were not reliable, for his military record in the Great Sioux War earned him the abiding enmity of officials in Washington DC. Dispatched to Fort Randall in the Dakota Territory, he remained a prisoner of war for nearly two years.[37]

Sitting Bull's time as a prisoner of war revealed his capacity for adaptation. With the thirty-two lodges of his band under the eye of armed sentinels, he found ways to tolerate the constraints around the military outpost. He accepted the constant surveillance of the bluecoats as well as the rations of pork, hardtack, and flour they provided. From nearby agencies, former headmen sought his advice. The inquisitive press reported on his routines, which involved occasional interviews and photographs. He began writing his Anglicized name in cursive script and signed autographs for tourists. He met with several visitors to the prison camp, including Reverend John P. Williamson, a Presbyterian missionary serving at the nearby Yankton agency; Thomas H. Tibbles, an Indian rights activist at the Rosebud agency; Alice Fletcher, an ethnologist investigating the customs of Indigenous societies; and scores of curiosity seekers. He expressed particular affinity for Rudolf Cronau, a visiting German writer and artist, who staged an exhibition of Native American portraits at Fort Randall. He befriended almost anyone willing to treat him with respect and kindness, which signified a kind of diplomatic posture that enabled him to hone his messages for a wider audience.[38]

After reviewing a decade-old collection of "ledger art" depicting his war deeds, Sitting Bull created at least three autobiographical sets of drawings at Fort Randall. He used paper, pencil, ink, and watercolors, likely obtained from the post trader, Daniel L. Pratt, for the first set of drawings. Acting

Sitting Bull, half-length portrait, seated, facing front, holding calumet, 1881.

on behalf of Brigadier General John C. Smith, Lieutenant Wallace Tear of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry traded some blankets and clothing to Sitting Bull for yet another set of drawings; Sitting Bull gave the blankets and clothes to Lakota children. Sitting Bull presented his third set of drawings to the youngest daughter of the regimental quartermaster, Captain Horace Quimby, whose wife, Martha, often brought food to the prison camp. Aided by interpreters and scribes at the military outpost, Sitting Bull told his own story with flair.[39]

With Sitting Bull detained at Fort Randall, the US government expanded the "white man's road" across the northern Great Plains. Inside the Department of the Interior, the Office of Indian Affairs issued edicts intended to force the cultural assimilation of all Native Americans. Though the *hochoka* continued to represent the center of gravity for the Lakota way of life, federal agents wielded greater control over tribal leadership. As traditional lines of authority crumbled, the *itancan* at the various Lakota agencies were belittled as "relics of barbarism." Police units, whose badges spawned the nickname *ceska maza*, or "metal breasts," assumed responsibility for law enforcement at each agency. Missionaries, churches, and schools proliferated along the tributaries of the upper Missouri, generating mixed results. Though undermined by the organization of the reservation system, aspects of "Indianness" contributed to a distinct sense of collective identity. Over the years, Sitting Bull advised his people: "When you find anything good in the white man's road, pick it up; but when you find something bad, or that turns out bad, drop it, leave it alone."[40]

Standing Rock

Assigned to the Standing Rock agency in 1883, Sitting Bull lived peacefully in a log cabin along the Grand River. A brother-in-law, Gray Eagle, offered him shelter within the small settlement some forty miles southwest of Fort Yates. Sitting Bull's general health declined while he was there, and he complained about constant fatigue. His face appeared drawn on one side; one of his eyes twitched. He did not expect to live for long. Designated a district farmer, he passed the days tending horses, cattle, and chickens while cultivating oats, corn, and potatoes. Family members worked the fields too.

He continued to raise five children in his household, including two pairs of twins—all boys—as well as a girl named Standing Holy. His wives gave birth to two more children. Unfortunately, his nineteen-year-old daughter, Walks Looking, died from a disease. A number of grandchildren kept him thinking about the future. Although distrustful of the US government, he urged the boys and girls to attend a nearby Christian day school in order to learn how to read and to write. He gave no indication of a decline in Lakota spiritualism. With the sun dance and "pagan practices" prohibited at Standing Rock, he looked for complementary expressions of power and knowledge in the established churches. For example, he donned a crucifix on occasion. Perhaps he appreciated the Virgin Mary as a human incarnation of Divine Motherhood to the extent that she was syncretic with a sacred Lakota entity known as White Buffalo Calf Maiden. The dogmas of religiosity, however, perplexed him. He surmised wryly: "The Sioux were better Christians before they ever heard of Christ than the white men are now."[41]

Meanwhile, Sitting Bull came to terms with a world turned upside down. James "White Hair" McLaughlin, the Standing Rock agent, dismissed him as "an Indian of very mediocre ability" and bemoaned "his sheer obstinacy and stubborn tenacity." Complying with an agency demand for law and order, Sitting Bull quietly directed One Bull, his nephew, to join the police force. His sympathizers at Standing Rock remained deferential, even though chieftains such as Four Horns and Black Moon descended into idleness; both were dead by the end of the decade. Gall, now a corpulent "boss" farmer, gained wider influence among the Hunkpapa. Considered a "good talker," a Sihasapa named Charging Bear, or John Grass, relished the agent's patronage. As at other agencies, Standing Rock formed an Indian court as a weapon against "demoralizing and barbarous" customs. Whatever the discretion of the judges, the list of Indian "offenses" included polygamy, healing ceremonies, and traditional feasts. Sitting Bull continued to assemble the Silent Eaters, who vowed in secret meetings to protect him at all costs.[42]

Sitting Bull became a minor celebrity during the Gilded Age. Agent McLaughlin permitted him to participate in a grand parade celebrating the recognition of Bismarck as the capital of the Dakota Territory. Then, in 1884, the legendary Lakota appeared in a traveling exhibition run by

Minnesota businessman Alvaren Allen. His presence stirred the passions of audiences. He sang, danced, and spoke at a venue in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; there, Luther Standing Bear, an Oglala youth enrolled at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, met him following the performance. The next year Sitting Bull was allowed to join Buffalo Bill's Wild West, a traveling vaudevillian show organized by William F. Cody. Possibly intrigued by the staging of the Plains Indian wars, he participated in a four-month tour, earning $50 a week and a bonus of $125 for appearing on a light gray horse in the arena. He stood next to "Long Hair" Cody for a publicity picture, which featured the two in an affable pose. He favored "Little Sure Shot," the performer Annie Oakley, and unofficially adopted her as a daughter. While hearing boos and hisses from rowdy crowds, he profited from the sale of autographs and photocards in more than a dozen cities. He brought a portion of his earnings home as income but gave away the rest to the "street urchins" he encountered. He stayed with the troupe until the end of the season, eager to visit with the Great Father in Washington DC. Cody made a fortune from the extravaganzas, but Agent McLaughlin abruptly halted Sitting Bull's career in show business.[43]

Upon returning to Standing Rock, Sitting Bull tried to assert his authority over all the agency's figureheads. He called for a revival of the sun dances and other suppressed conventions. He joined a Sioux delegation on a journey to the Crow Reservation, where the traditional enemies shook hands, talked about politics, and enjoyed festivities near the Little Bighorn River. In 1887, Sitting Bull learned that the Dawes Act legalized a zealous scheme for the allotment of reservation lands in severalty to tribal members. He chafed at the partitioning of the Lakota lands into six reservations: Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, and Lower Brule. He denounced the injustices of the Sioux Agreement, which ruthlessly diminished tribal landholding and opened an additional nine million acres for non-Indian settlement. As each cut reduced independence and sustainability for the Plains Indians, his malaise deepened. Sitting Bull joined another Sioux delegation on a train trip to the national capital. There, he entered the White House to shake hands with US President Grover Cleveland but failed to gain support for the delegation's counterproposals. On November 2, 1889, North and South Dakota became new states, entering the Union together. His sense of fatalism growing, Sitting Bull received a dire warning

Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill.

from a meadowlark that he would die at the hands of the Lakota. "I would rather die an Indian," he prophetically remarked to friends at Standing Rock, "than live a white man."[44]

Sitting Bull perceived another menacing omen: alcohol abuse. He said that intoxication appeared to "crumple up" or deaden the soul and that his people should "separate themselves from drunkards." He refused to

even taste whiskey and disdained its influence over others. Perhaps the sacramental use of wine for a Catholic communion was acceptable, but he posited that the frequent consumption of distilled spirits by the Long Knives may have helped his warriors defeat them at the Little Bighorn River. Whiskey seemed to replace the buffalo as a priority during the Gilded Age, giving "no hope for the Indians." In fact, observed Sitting Bull, prairie winds and rain showers would need to purify the souls of human beings for hundreds of years in order to prevent the odor of alcohol from making the afterlife so noxious.[45]

In 1889, the plight of the Sioux garnered the attention of the National Indian Defense Association, or NIDA, a philanthropic clique in Washington DC derided by the press for its "sentimentalists." One member, a pious, wealthy New Yorker who called herself Catherine Weldon, visited Standing Rock that summer. Previously known as Caroline Schlatter, she was a divorcée with an eleven-year-old son, Christie. The Hunkpapa dubbed her "Woman Walking Ahead." Newspapermen scorned her as "Sitting Bull's Squaw." After hearing about her "high words" against the machinations of Agent McLaughlin, Sitting Bull invited her and her son to stay at his cabin for a time. While sharing domestic responsibilities with his wives, she purchased provisions, penned correspondence, and counseled him. She urged Sitting Bull and other recruits to become members of the NIDA. One of her oil paintings—a portrait of the aging chief—hung on his cabin wall. Whatever the nature of her relationship with him, she lamented that so many Indians "reject the true Christ about whom I spoke." Her crusade came to an end in late 1890, when she sadly packed her belongings to leave the Dakotas. Sitting Bull escorted her and her son to Fort Yates, saying farewell to them for the last time.[46]

Sitting Bull foresaw grave dangers at Standing Rock, as the apocalyptic mood seemed palpable. The *wasi'chus* insisted on a doctrine of settler sovereignty, which gave them property and rights in newly organized states while simultaneously dispossessing and impoverishing the Indigenous populations. Reservation communities fractured into "progressive" and "nonprogressive" elements, shattering cultural cohesiveness. Whooping cough, measles, influenza, and other maladies took a heavy toll on life, especially among families with malnourished children or ailing elders. Due to restricted mobility, the limited access to water supplies caused

alarm. Soaring temperatures accompanied a midsummer drought that devastated the farmlands and livestock. Crop failures and ration reductions exacerbated food shortages. The bison herds no longer thundered across the North American grasslands. In the absence of federal or state relief measures, fears of famine intensified. The corralled hunters and gatherers struggled to make sense of the evil that had befallen them and pondered the ominous signs of a last sunset. Then, in the far western sections of the United States, a Paiute holy man named Wovoka shared a prophecy: a new millennium was coming.[47]

Likely influenced by Christian teachings, Wovoka dreamt of the Messiah during a solar eclipse. The heterodox messages of "God's red son" echoed the Biblical texts referenced by clergy and missionaries. Returning from pilgrimages to meet the prophet, a cadre of Lakota believers mentioned seeing Jesus or the Christ in their communal reporting. Some indicated that Wovoka himself was a savior, while others spoke of a heavenly paragon. Millenarianism promoted a belief in the imminent collapse of a corrupt, fallen world followed by its replacement with a just, utopian order. Even if particular elements of "God's kingdom" may have resonated with the First Peoples of North America, the intolerance evinced by religious authorities made the coexistence of belief systems difficult. According to church officials, 4,757 souls among 18,000 or so Lakota had converted to Christianity by 1889. In spite of the rampant hunger and thirst, federal agents would withhold government-issued supplies from individuals refusing to attend church. The woebegone populace stood at a crossroads. By relaying a code for living, Wovoka's Ghost Dance movement pointed a generation in crisis toward both a traditional path and a pan-Indian future.[48]

On October 9, 1890, Kicking Bear, a Miniconjou Sioux from the Cheyenne River Reservation and trusted relative of Sitting Bull, came to Standing Rock with the "good news" from Wovoka: participation in the *wanagi wachipi ki*, or "spirit dance" ceremony, induced a visionary experience. Through this ceremony the "chosen people" of *Wakantanka* could envisage the return of the buffalo, deer, and elk as well as the resurrection of deceased kith and kin. The great transformation revealed in these visions would revive the prairies with a rich layer of sod; the rivers would swell with fresh water; the skies would brighten with new hope. A new Heaven and new Earth would restore peace and justice to the "red children," who would no longer fear

the aggression of the "white man." A blessed "ghost shirt" would protect them from deadly weaponry, or so Kicking Bear claimed.[49] At first skeptical of this magical thinking, Sitting Bull planted a prayer tree north of his cabin and became the "chief apostle" of the dances at the Grand River camp. As docile students abandoned the reservation schools and awaited the final countdown, he appointed a dance director for the small settlement. He painted his face and carried his medicine bag, wearing what appeared to be a "ghost shirt" decorated with a red cross. The zealous crowds near his cabin began to increase in number, as many yearned to experience the forbidden sun dances once again. Sitting Bull's interest in these messianic notions invigorated a last-ditch effort to renew Lakota ways.[50]

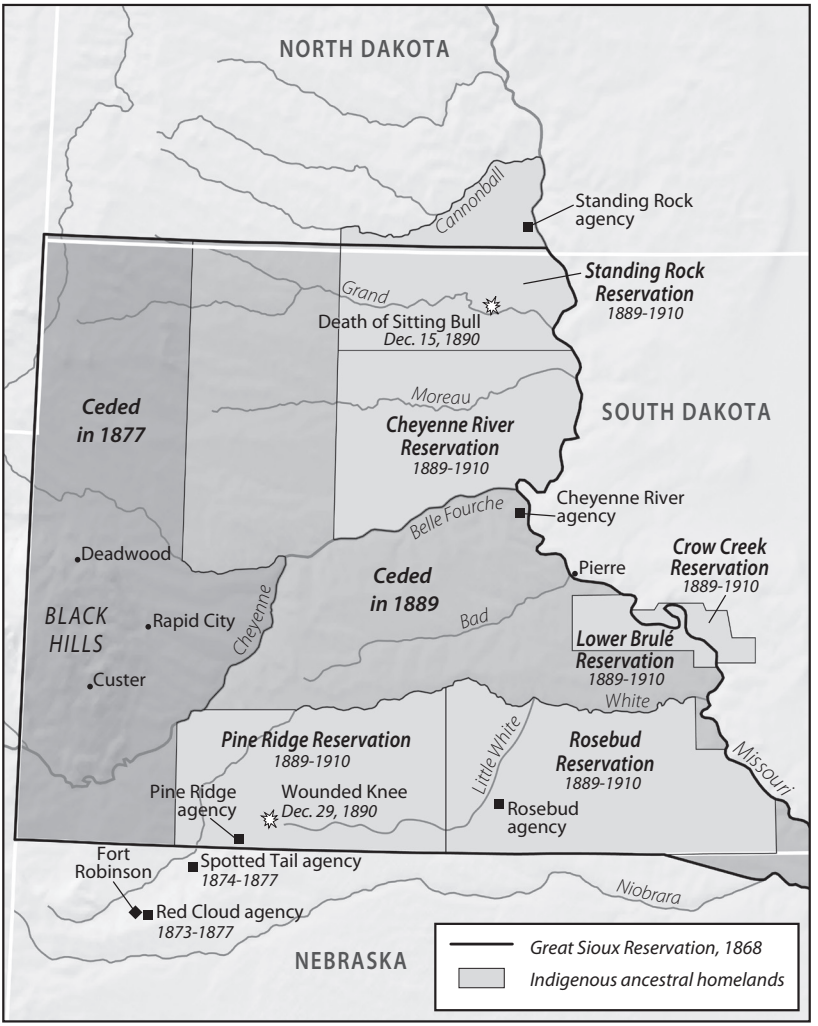
From dawn to dusk, Sitting Bull watched over the multitude, fasted, and prayed for guidance. He allegedly broke his sacred peace pipe in the presence of the assembled Ghost Dancers, but rumors of his return to militancy may have been false. He refused to go to the agency headquarters to accept the paltry rations and, in the spirit of the *wanagi wachipi ki*, urged the Lakota men, women, and children to link hand to hand in a vibrant ring of motion—jumping, whirling, and singing—until they collapsed in the circle of brush arbors. While visiting the Grand River camp, Agent McLaughlin observed that Sitting Bull's body appeared diminished from deprivation and exertion, reduced to mere skin and bones. He walked from his cabin to the tents wearing little more than a breechclout and moccasins, wrapping himself in a blanket in preparation for a "feast with the ghosts." His wits remained as sharp as ever, however, and he conducted nightly séances and ministered to an ecstatic throng gathered at the river. His herald, Bull Ghost, announced a series of enchanting messages that arrived telepathically. Sitting Bull insisted that participants in the *wanagi wachipi ki* cleanse themselves every morning with a vapor bath in small sweat lodges. The participants remained in the heat as long as their bodies could endure it, only emerging from an *inikagapi* when ready to be anointed by the "high priest." Sitting Bull's followers grew to as many as two hundred in number.[51]

Mary C. Collins, a Congregationalist missionary at Standing Rock, complained that Sitting Bull was leading her converts back into "heathendom." Regardless of their cultural differences, he called her *Wenonah*, or "first daughter," out of respect and honored her as a "medicine woman." She referred to him as the "head chief," acknowledging that he possessed

a "very indefinable power" among the Lakota. After a singing of "Nearer My God to Thee," her sermonizing continued inside his "holy tent." She marveled at his comprehension of the Bible but scolded him for preaching that "the Christ had come for the Indians now and that they alone would rise." When dry weather threatened their harvests, she watched as he took a buffalo skin, waved it through the air, placed it upon the ground, and performed gestures with his hands. To her astonishment, it rained. As winter approached that year, she recalled that he claimed the miraculous ability to feed his followers no matter the season. "Yes, my people," he predicted before a surging congregation at the Grand River camp, "you can dance all the winter this year, the sun will shine warmly, and the weather will be fair."[52]

The Standing Rock police attempted to intimidate Sitting Bull, who responded calmly by saying the gatherings would wane in time. Lawman One Bull learned that most of Sitting Bull's followers expected a climactic regeneration to occur during the spring months; he also heard that Indians who doubted the prophecy might turn into dogs. One Bull lost his job with the police force following his own participation in the Ghost Dance circles. One Bull's pregnant wife Red Whirlwind and his daughter Rosie continued to reside at his uncle's cabin. With rations scarce or inedible, One Bull earned a few dollars by hauling freight from a railroad town to the agency warehouse. He frequented the trader's store. He kept an eye on his uncle at the riverside while hearing about the coming of bluecoats from the Heart River, Slim Buttes, and Fort Sully. Even if doubts arose about his fidelity, he outfitted a horse for carrying loads on short hauls and attempted to get back home on wintery nights. Though lacking definitive proof, a few voices opined that One Bull betrayed Sitting Bull by spying on behalf of federal agents.[53]

Because Sitting Bull stood among the "leaders of disaffection," Agent McLaughlin worried that the Lakota might attempt to orchestrate a major breakout from Standing Rock. Around this time young and old Indians left the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River Reservations to gather anxiously at a tableland refuge identified as "the Stronghold." Short Bull, an ally of Kicking Bear and a disciple of Wovoka's "gospel," invited the *wichásha wakán* to the site. But Sitting Bull remained with his inner circle at the Grand River camp and posed no danger to anyone. In late 1890, US



Map of Lakota Reservations, 1890.

President Benjamin Harrison dispatched approximately seven thousand soldiers to assist the agencies in thwarting a perceived insurrection. Secretary of the Interior John W. Noble granted immediate jurisdiction to the US Army for the emergency crackdown. Major General Miles, now commanding the Military Division of the Missouri, authorized "Buffalo Bill" Cody to "secure the person of Sitting Bull," but his order was rescinded. Within

days, Colonel William F. Drum at Fort Yates received a similar order. Working in concert with the armed forces—and without providing legitimate substantiation for formal charges—Agent McLaughlin directed loyal members of the Standing Rock police to arrest Sitting Bull. "You must not let him escape under any circumstances," stated the postscript of his letter to the police officers. Evidently, Sitting Bull intended to visit "the Stronghold" that winter and had notified Agent McLaughlin of his pending departure.[54]

The air turned cold on Monday, December 15, 1890. The sky was dark and hazy at daybreak. A mix of sleet and rain fell on the ground. Equipped with a Hotchkiss gun and a Gatling gun from Fort Yates, Captain Edmond G. Fechet of the Eighth Cavalry positioned troops near the Oak Creek crossing of the road approaching the Grand River camp. At least forty-three mounted members of a Lakota police unit rode to Sitting Bull's cabin. Three officers burst through the entry, grabbed the slumbering chief from his bed, and pushed him toward the door. Stumbling forward in moccasins, he sang a farewell song to his family. Aroused by the sound of barking dogs, over a hundred dancers from the camp rallied to defend him. "Then I will not go," he said at the doorway—likely his last words. One of his wives, Four Robes, noticed that the well-armed lawmen "smelled of whiskey," as one of his confidantes, Catch the Bear, bolted toward them. Closing their ranks, the police shot Sitting Bull seven times. Lieutenant Bull Head shot him in the chest, while Sergeant Red Tomahawk shot him in the head. Restrained and unarmed, he fell in front of his cabin. His teenage son Crow Foot was also killed in cold blood by the gunfire. The scrum turned into chaos, and the frightened bystanders fled for their lives in all directions. The dying and wounded writhed on the ground. Within a fifty-yard radius of the cabin, Sitting Bull, seven of his entourage, and four officers died immediately. At least two more officers were mortally wounded. Sadly, Sitting Bull's final vision of his own death had come to pass.[55]

A Lakota winter count later documented the crime scene, revealing hoofprints and bullet casings around Sitting Bull's cabin.[56] With the lifting of the morning fog came speculation, accusations, and curses. Within an hour or so of the shooting a blue skirmish line moved into position to secure the perimeter, but damage to the premises suggests that plundering and pillaging ensued. US soldiers heard wailing all around as the deceased Lakota's blood pooled at their feet. The lifeless victim sprawled before

them. Holy Medicine, a slain policeman's brother, smashed Sitting Bull's face with a blow from a wooden neck yoke. A member of the military outfit interceded to halt further mutilation. Enlisted men loaded the corpses into an old farm wagon for transport to Fort Yates. During a postmortem inspection of Sitting Bull's body, an attending physician took a piece of his hair and stole his leggings. Sitting Bull's remains were wrapped in a blanket and placed inside a pine box, which was then buried in the northwest corner of the post cemetery. No funeral or ceremony consecrated the spot. To mark the solitary gravesite, a plain headboard of wood was painted with stenciled black words: "Sitting Bull, Indian." Officially, the military records confirmed the interment on December 17, 1890.[57]

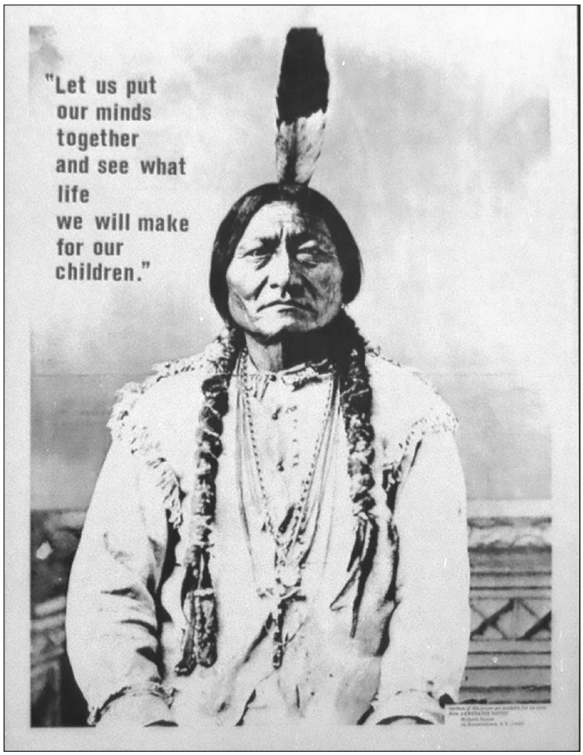
The killing of Sitting Bull set the stage for more bloodshed in the coming days. Several of his dismayed associates raced to the camp of Spotted Elk, who was known also as Big Foot. Responding to telegrams, General Miles issued a series of orders from his Chicago headquarters to stop the "outbreak" in the northern Great Plains. There were some four thousand Ghost Dancers among the Lakota—that is, as much as one-quarter of the whole population but in no sense a majority. Of course, the regulars, auxiliaries, and policemen outnumbered possible insurgents in a confrontation. On December 29, 1890, the Seventh Cavalry detained Big Foot and his 340 campers at Wounded Knee Creek. The Lakota hoisted a white flag beneath a battery of four Hotchkiss guns situated on a hilltop. Then, when a shot rang out, the cordon of 470 US soldiers opened fire with rifles, revolvers, and artillery. What had started as a possible—though mostly one-sided—battle instantly became a massacre. For example, point-blank executions and shocking atrocities occurred in a gulch. At least 270 Lakota perished across the killing field, likely half of which were women and children. In the aftermath, a winter storm covered the ground with a blanket of snow. On New Year's Day of 1891, military details began to collect the frozen, mangled bodies of the dead.[58]

Sitting Bull's people could do little to hold back the settler sovereignty that had defined the concerted efforts of the US government to diminish the *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ*. With each wave of colonization, the *wasi'chus* insisted on the right to conquer native space one way or another. Even though "ethnic cleansing" was not a term in use before the twentieth century, its definition certainly applies to the widespread, systematic assault directed

by governmental functionaries against a stateless group with durable claims to an ancestral homeland. The bison ecology had sustained the Lakota way of life for ages, but the demise of self-sufficiency made them largely dependent on an inept bureaucracy for sustenance. Isolation and starvation became their lot. An array of coercive measures forced them to give up communal landholdings and to survive on splintered reservations in the northern Great Plains. Officials in Washington DC left behind a trail of broken treaties that resulted in frontier violence from the Black Hills to Wounded Knee. Enflaming passions again and again, policymakers dismissed a "vanishing race." Even if reforms promised better days, the 1924 grant of citizenship to all Native Americans in the country came far too late to prevent the injustices. In a long-delayed judicial opinion, the US Supreme Court mentioned "Sitting Bull's notable victory" at the Little Bighorn while upholding an award of more than $100 million to the Siouxan litigants. Because some Siouxan voices wanted not money but the return of the taken territory, the funds were never paid out, instead accruing interest in a Bureau of Indian Affairs account.[59]

The US government proclaimed an end to the "Last Indian War," yet the bones of Sitting Bull did not lie undisturbed. On April 7, 1953, Clarence Gray Eagle, the son of Sitting Bull's brother-in-law, led a disinterment party to the Fort Yates gravesite. They exhumed what they could find, which they then reburied in a heavy concrete vault near Mobridge, South Dakota. A large memorial bust at the burial site overlooks the Missouri River, despite doubts about the actual final resting place of Sitting Bull. Some accounts note that his skull, shoulder blade, ribs, and other pieces had been removed earlier from the Fort Yates gravesite. Others insist that skeletal fragments lie in multiple spots. The whole truth may never be known.[60]

Sitting Bull's name is among the best known of any Native American leader; his story circulated around the world. His demonstration of spiritual strength illustrated the Lakota virtues of bravery, fortitude, generosity, and wisdom. While mobilizing Indigenous communities during the twilight of the Plains Indian wars, he faced long odds in an epic struggle for living space. His resiliency emboldened a resistance movement against the military posture of the United States, which all too often pushed aside tribal groups across the North American continent. Holding on to a deeply rooted existence, he focused on a holy mission to save—in the words of



"Let us put our minds together and see what life we will make for our children."

the Siouxan speakers—*mitakuye oyasin*, or "all my relatives." His battles against Manifest Destiny made him a heroic symbol of an unbroken past, albeit with an exalted "chieftainship." He perceived what others could not see because of his farsightedness regarding the changes in the land. Even though his death came with a sudden burst of gunfire, his visions of self-determination gave future generations the chance to imagine a road ahead. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council chartered Sitting Bull College, where one of his warbonnets is kept on display. "Let us put our minds together," he appears to say on a graphic poster of the late twentieth century, "and see what life we will make for our children."[61] In that heartfelt sense, Sitting Bull's kind of war never ends.

Note on Sources and Methods

The histories of the Plains Indian wars document the First Peoples of North America, occasionally attributing quotes to Sitting Bull, a Lakota Sioux leader. Scholars have identified the recorded sayings of a nonliterate person, who achieved remarkable prominence in defense of an ancestral homeland. Nevertheless, the exact wording remains difficult to untangle from distortions and errata that obscure what is knowable. The search for authentic Native American perspectives has unearthed pieces that bear the imprint of orality: short, provocative, memorable, oft-repeated phrases, anecdotes, songs, and prayers. Interdisciplinary studies have demonstrated how an oral tradition endeavors to retain the essence or gist of utterances. Vetting assigns levels of reliability and validity to the available evidence, especially if corroboration exists in surviving accounts. Since archives, libraries, and museums evaluate scores of literary artifacts, careful discernment gives credence to discourses that otherwise may be apocryphal.

The coherence of Sitting Bull's discourse survives in the partial and fragmentary evidence of a remembered past. Unfortunately, the unsystematic elaboration of observations that one only hopes to be accurate contributes to the acceptance of misinformation. Even the finest transmitters of an oral tradition do not ordinarily recall a long word-for-word recitation with precision. It can be likened to an experiment with whispers in a proverbial "telephone game." The absence or scarcity of written records can undermine confidence in storytelling, but the impressions of a speaker remain noteworthy. Whenever initial statements appear verifiable, key voices gain a sympathetic audience through the cultural production, dissemination, and circulation of historical memories. Academic inquiries into verbiage, innuendo, gestures, play, code-switching, and silences help to clarify the intentions and meanings of a transcribed text.

An effective strategy for the presentation of any text is to appreciate its wider context. For example, a host of writers have explored the Battle of the Little Bighorn from the different sides of "Custer's Hill." Drawn to a place

also known as the Greasy Grass, some have unearthed significant clues for the substantiation of overlooked claims. Almost any disclosure that surprises or embarrasses authorities is liable to earn attention, although unpalatable details seldom make it into an official record. One can survey the governmental reports to see if a possible source betrays a pattern of inconsistencies about geography, forces, or circumstances. Furthermore, the journalistic coverage by newspaper correspondents on assignment deserves close scrutiny. Hearsay recounted years after an event should be doubted, yet a verbatim transcription can be compelling if cross-referenced and confirmed by a series of interrogations. The transparency of citations and bibliographies enhance the practices of textual analysis, which inform a historian's approach to puzzling attributions.

Many different people influenced the attributions of an Indigene. Tribal leaders sent word outside their inner circles, occasionally authorizing couriers to "telegraph" messages to others. Whereas the rare communication passed through several mouths, ears, and minds, it was memorialized on loose sheets of paper at campgrounds, military outposts, or agency offices. Firsthand renderings also appeared in the compilations of Plains Indian "ledger art," which traveled hundreds of miles before arriving at a final destination. Producing a "first draft of history," a New York journalist named Willis Fletcher Johnson assembled *The Red Record of the Sioux: Life of Sitting Bull and History of the Indian War of 1890–91* (1891). In the wake of the Gilded Age, histories too often relegated the material to the realm of fanciful legends.

Composing under the pseudonym of Stanley Vestal, Walter S. Campbell filled a gap in the histories of the North American frontier and borderlands. He taught literature and creative writing at the University of Oklahoma, where the Western History Collections catalogued his research notes, professional correspondence, and assorted manuscripts. Beginning in the 1920s, he made visits to the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. While enlisting Sitting Bull's relatives for field research, he paid money to retain translators and to organize consultations. Notably, Henry Oscar One Bull, the second son of Sitting Bull's sister Good Feather Woman and Makes Room, a Miniconjou chieftain, had been born in 1853. His older brother, Joseph White Bull, had been born in 1849. Both siblings collaborated with Campbell until they died in 1947. Even if uncertain about cultural and

linguistic subtleties, he recognized the contributions of thirty-four Lakota informants. Their joint efforts inspired his original biography, *Sitting Bull: Champion of the Sioux* (1932). The revised editions lacked ample footnoting, yet the "new" sources established the foundation of Campbell's work.

More than fifty years later, historian Robert Utley crafted a masterpiece, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (1993), which exploited Campbell's collection. His award-winning book also cited a trove of documents in the US National Archives as well as reports by Canadian government officials. While acknowledging social and intellectual differences, he stressed the logic of Sitting Bull's actions during the Great Sioux War.

A mix of writers continue to refine the historical canons of a new millennium. To name just one, a great-grandson of Sitting Bull, Ernie LaPointe, shared personal insights about his great-grandfather in *Sitting Bull: His Life and Legacy* (2011). Based on recollections from family lore, it was written by a lineal descendant born on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Focused upon these and other writings, I have undertaken a quest to locate and to preserve the sentiments of Sitting Bull for a "red-letter" anthology. Whenever considering the credibility of any source, the first question for a historian is about its content: What is the source saying? Moreover, historical research and methods deem a second question worth asking: What is the source doing when presented to an audience? Within the broad sweep of history, my aim is to comprehend an extraordinary human being through his own words. A combination of first-person testimony began with a Lakota Sioux, who spoke for those struggling against conquest. The excerpts of primary and secondary sources reveal a quotable Sitting Bull in a time for war.

Sorting through the most likely quotations, I am guided by three rules of evidence. First, only elocutions traceable to a time and place of transmission can have originated with Sitting Bull. Second, proximate interlocutors of an articulation would have retained the substance of what had been spoken if they were assisted by a translator or were familiar with his native tongue. Third, a close or similar transcription of a sample must have merited two or more attestations in order to give sufficient assurance about the plausibility of an embedding. With these three rules uppermost in mind, I am sharing with readers what Sitting Bull said.

With regard to editing what has been said, my policy is to show the work. Thucydides, the model of an ancient Greek historian, famously handled the dialogue of various speakers by making them say whatever seemed appropriate to him. Sitting Bull, however, seized opportunities to speak for himself. In spite of confusion and discrepancies in sourcing, historians try to get as close as possible to the general scope of the exact wording. Interventions involve only minor alterations to typography, formatting, paragraphing, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, which address momentary lapses, awkward syntax, or sleights of hand. The presence of inconsistent or quaint grammar warrants caution, just as an unclear or omitted comment calls for a brief insertion with brackets. Relevant asides appear in parenthesis. If a passage is digressive, interrupted, or truncated, then the occasional ellipses indicates a subjective breakage within a sentence or a paragraph. For any given entry, I avoid excessive markings so that the word flow of an extract stays even and accessible. The overall objective in this kind of editorial process is to facilitate a curated reading of a concise history with documents.

The documents from a bygone era utilize terminology that can be problematic. The term "Indians" was a conception of Europeans, while recent writers choose to employ "Native Americans," "First Peoples," or "Indigenous." The term "Sioux" encompasses myriad bands and tribal groups, including the "Teton" or "Lakota." While a mixture of nomenclature has been associated with residual populations, no interpretation of languages is free from social construction. My preference is to use appropriate parlance for each document.

My formulation of the documents respects a Lakota tradition: the sacred number four. There are four annual seasons, four lunar phases, four cardinal directions, and four basic elements. Thus, the documents of the Lakota Sioux leader resonate with four chronological themes: Emergence, Battleground, Border Crossings, and Standing Rock.