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Book Review: The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee

Carole Barrett
University of Mary

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The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee. By Jeffrey Ostler. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xviii + 387 pp. Maps, illustrations, index. \$65.00 cloth, \$21.99 paper.

Colonialism becomes the lens through which Jeffrey Ostler both analyzes and interprets the history of the Plains Sioux. His account begins in 1803 when the United States claimed sovereignty over Sioux lands through the Louisiana Purchase and extends through the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890), which Ostler interprets as an anticolonial response to the reservation system. Expansion of geographic boundaries and economic interests led the United States to

claim dominion over the tribes in the West, and this, in turn, led to conflict, conquest, and eventual control over the tribal nations. In examining this dynamic of contact and conquest, Ostler concentrates on the Plains Sioux, tribes that actively contested both the process and the policies of colonialism in efforts to maintain their own cultural integrity. In large and small ways, the Sioux adapted and re-created familiar cultural patterns under new conditions, and this becomes the important focus of the book—insertion of the Sioux into their own histories. He develops a Sioux perspective through sources such as eyewitness accounts, versions of events written in the Lakota language, examination of the cultural meaning of Lakota words, reinterpretation and reexamination of military records, diaries of various participants, and so on.

The book reinterprets well-known events in the early reservation history of the Plains Sioux—1868 Fort Laramie Treaty negotiations, the death of Crazy Horse, establishment of the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies, the Ghost Dance, and Wounded Knee, among others. Ostler is a meticulous researcher and persists in questioning military records and government reports, commonly used sources in constructing Plains Sioux history, in order to develop a Lakota context. In his examination of the Ghost Dance the author contests the notion that the movement as it developed among the Sioux was principally a revitalization movement rooted in religion; rather he sees it largely as a political movement that attracted those bands most opposed to the reservation system. Ghost shirts and dresses began appearing in November 1890 when the buildup of soldiers on the four Lakota reservations intensified; the garments represent a need for protection, and do not indicate plans to use violence, a common interpretation of military historians.

Ostler's book provides a fascinating reexamination of major events in nineteenth-century Plains Sioux history. He centers the Sioux in these accounts and examines ways in which they contributed to shaping these events. Ostler is not shy about raising contro-

versies and asserting the need to reinterpret some of the standard academic renderings of Plains Sioux history. This book, an important piece of scholarship, is likely to inspire intense conversation and even debate among scholars of the Plains Sioux because it proposes new interpretations.

CAROLE BARRETT

Department of American Indian Studies
University of Mary, Bismarck