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Book Review: Red Cloud: Photographs of a Lakota Chief

Joel Minor  
Oglala Lakota College

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In the latter half of the nineteenth century a deadly clash of cultures swept across the Great Plains of this continent. Perhaps no tribe resisted the Euro-American invasion more fiercely than the Lakota bands of Sioux, and perhaps no one embodied this resistance for the Euro-American public more than Red Cloud.

In Red Cloud: Photographs of a Lakota Chief, Frank H. Goodyear III focuses on the last thirty-seven years of Red Cloud's life, when his role as a leader of the Oglala Lakota shifted from military to diplomatic. In that time Red Cloud appeared in at least 128 photographs, eighty-one of which are presented chronologically in Goodyear's book. About fifteen illustrations are also included.

Goodyear admits in his introduction that using photography for historical biography is a non-traditional methodology, but postulates that it can provide unique insights into a person, as well as shifts in cultural relations. Because the rise of photography coincided with Red Cloud's life as a diplomat, and because he
was so widely photographed, Red Cloud is the
perfect subject on which to test this theory.

Those who would like an analytical method
for studying photographs would do well to read
Goodyear's book. In fact, there is a benefit in
using photographs as biography that Goodyear
does not mention: one can study the sources
directly oneself, along with the author. For
the most part Goodyear objectively points out
what is notable in each photograph, and just
as importantly he gives historical contexts
surrounding the photo sessions.

For Goodyear, Red Cloud's willingness—
or even eagerness—to be the subject of the
dominant society's intruding eye stemmed
from two major motivations: to help bridge
the gap between the conflicting cultures of
the Euro-Americans and his own people; and
to maintain his roles as leader and advocate
for the Oglala. Goodyear also speculates on
the motivations of the Euro-Americans who
created and demanded these photographic
records, which most often but not always ran
contrary to Red Cloud's goals.

The photographs in the book are repro-
duced nicely, each one aligned with its corre-
sponding description. Goodyear writes
concisely and convincingly, and includes thor-
ough notes and a helpful bibliography. More
than another coffee table book or another bi-
ography, Red Cloud: Photographs of a Lakota
Chief offers sharp insights into a major per-
sona of the Great Plains, and into the new and
foreign technology in which he confided.

JOEL MINOR
Archivist
Oglala Lakota College