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Review of Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux

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Indians flocked into southern Minnesota during the 1850s. Resentment changed to bitterness around him as eastern Sioux people exchanged some 10,000,000 acres for a narrow strip of land along the upper St. Peter's River that could not sustain them. When finally they took up arms in the early 1860s, Little Crow became their symbol of resistance. At length, more than 1,500 Sioux were confined while several thousand retreated to the prairies of Dakota Territory and western Canada. At the war's end, Little Crow paid with his life when he tried to come home. His life story epitomized the tragedy in the experience of four tribes caught on the east end of Sioux Country to face the cutting edge of the Anglo-American frontier.

As biography, Professor Anderson's book has obvious merit. It blends the story of a life with an explanation of the time. It focuses on the erosion of culture as well as the loss of land in a struggle that ended in expulsion for eastern Sioux. It contains a bibliography of standard manuscript and secondary sources wholly adequate to support a segment of the history of the Sioux-White relations with which it deals. Anderson has made a noteworthy contribution to literature regarding early troubles between Sioux people and non-Indians at the east end of Sioux Country while he has told the life story of a principal leader.

There are minor deficiencies in his work. Anderson has ignored a body of oral literature left by Sioux people regarding Little Crow that would have added interest to the text without changing the substance appreciably. There are mistakes in details here and there. Non-Indian casualties were closer to 600 than to 400 in the Minnesota Sioux War, for example, and at least 25,000 white people fled from the scene. The narrative lacks context to reveal the relative importance of the eastern Sioux conflict with non-Indians. Readers ought to be informed that Little Crow represented only segments of populations in four of thirteen Sioux tribes. His followers lost no more than one eighth of the land in Sioux Country. Their war was only one in a succession of

Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux. By Gary Clayton Anderson. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986. Maps, photographs, bibliography, index. 259 pp. Cloth \$19.95; paper, \$10.95.

This readable narrative chronicles the life of the eastern Sioux leader whose name has been associated with the Minnesota Sioux War for a role he accepted reluctantly. A genealogy and some background information explain why he assumed a moderate posture as non-

armed confrontations that went on between Sioux people and non-Indians for some thirty-six years. When the wars were over, eastern Sioux were scattered on sixteen of twenty-seven reserves and retreats occupied by Sioux in five states and three Canadian provinces. Accordingly, Little Crow was not the leading "Spokesman for the Sioux," as the subtitle suggests, but a symbol of resistance for a segment of their federation of tribes.

No matter. This is an important publication. Anyone who is interested in the history of Indian-White relations should read it. Professional historians, anthropologists, librarians and dedicated buffs all are advised to add it to their collections. It is the only substantial and reliable biography in print on the life of a significant Indian leader.

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