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Review of *Gall: Lakota War Chief* By Robert W. Larson

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Gall: Lakota War Chief. By Robert W. Larson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. xvi + 301 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95.

Dubbed the “Fighting Cock of the Sioux” by the U.S. soldiers he confronted, the Hunkpapa warrior Gall has at last found his rightful place on the book shelves of Great Plains history. A major challenge for any biographer is the lack of primary source material about Gall’s early life, a typical problem for anyone attempting a scholarly study about someone who flashes in and out of the historical record the way Gall does. Given the challenge he faced, Robert W. Larson has done a commendable job in compiling a plausible account of Gall’s movements and actions before he took up residence on the Standing Rock reservation in May of 1881 upon his return from Canada where he’d fled with other Lakota diehards following the Battle of the Little Bighorn, though much of what is presented is speculative. Nonetheless, Larson has provided a richly detailed history of Native life in the Northern Plains as well as the sequence of events that left the Lakota bereft of their homeland and their traditional way of life at the close of the nineteenth century.

The biography is based on extensive research, as evidenced by the copious notes, and the author appears to have uncovered just about every possible tidbit of factual information about Gall, who was overshadowed by Sitting Bull, his mentor, and the other Lakota luminaries of the era. That Gall was a formidable foe to both tribal enemies and the white trespassers on Lakota hunting grounds

is well documented. Physically impressive, bold in battle, and conspicuous in the red regalia he fancied, even Gall's adversaries gave him grudging admiration. Libby Custer, for one, upon seeing his photograph, exclaimed that she never "dreamed there could be . . . so fine a specimen of warrior."

Gall emerges from the historical shadows at Standing Rock where he sided with Agent James McLaughlin in opposing the Ghost Dance and encouraging his followers to follow the white man's road. He became a tribal judge, accepted Christianity, and became a role model for humanitarian reformers promoting Indian assimilation into mainstream society. Some, however, dismissed him as a political opportunist. Despite the author's exhaustive research, Gall's place in history remains difficult to determine. As Larson correctly concludes, "it is . . . as unfair to underestimate Gall's importance as it is to overstate it." Now, at least, there is a biography based on sound scholarship that will allow interested readers to make that determination for themselves.

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