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Review of *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life* By Kingsley M. Bray

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Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life. By Kingsley M. Bray. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. xviii + 510 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

It is a rare gift to receive a milestone book to review. Kingsley Bray's *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life* is such a gift, as well as a turning point in the historical literature of the Great Plains. Simply put, Bray's biography of the famed Lakota leader officially replaces Mari Sandoz's *Crazy Horse, the Strange Man of the Oglalas: A Biography* (1942) and consigns that most original work to the historical fiction section of our bookshelves where it has long belonged.

That it has taken sixty-plus years to supplant the one with the other speaks more of the difficulty of the subject and the seeming paucity of biographical sources than of the lack of attempts. Stephen Ambrose gave a warmed over version—combining the Custer story with Sandoz's, plus endnotes—in 1975, and scholars such as George Hyde, Robert Larson, James Olson, and Robert Utley focused on Crazy Horse's contemporaries—Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Spotted Tail. Most recently (1999) Larry McMurtry, another noted novelist, even took a crack at the story. That Crazy Horse always appeared more enigma than real person seemed to be a common thread running throughout these works.

Other scholars tried to flesh out the story by turning up more biographical details on this "strange man." A perusal through Bray's bibliography reveals all these efforts, particularly those nuggets found by Buecker, Dickson, Hardorff, Hedren, the Kadleceks, and Paul. Added together, though, these new sources on Crazy Horse do not explain the quantum leap that is Bray's contribution.

The book's thirty chapters, hundreds of detailed notes, and its gathering of a wealth of published and unpublished sources reflect a detailed, nuanced, and sensitive understanding of Lakota history and culture. Bray presents, therefore, a massively detailed analysis of a Native American leader together with a richly portrayed political context for understanding that life. This is the combination that has been lacking in prior efforts.

This scholarship has required, or rather allowed, Bray to tease out conclusions from his sources that others less knowledgeable or daring might have avoided. And if there are quibbles with his story, they are with the occasional contentious detail treated as foregone conclusion. For example, the presence of Cheyennes at the 1855 Harney massacre

of Little Thunder's Brulé Lakota village came from a single army officer reminiscence a half century later and is not corroborated by contemporary sources, and the 1868 death of a son of Red Cloud—not Jack, the only male progeny of the Oglala leader routinely accepted today—came from a questionable source as well.

But, again, these are points of minor contention and do nothing to detract from the great achievement of this book. Bray has set a high bar for nineteenth-century Indian biography, one it will be interesting to see twenty-first century authors and publishers approach—or avoid.

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