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Great Plains Studies, Center for

Summer 1998

Review of *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* Edited by Charles E. Rankin

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Urwin, Gregory J., "Review of *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* Edited by Charles E. Rankin" (1998). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2053.

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Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Edited by Charles E. Rankin. Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996. Illustrations, index. xxv + 332 pp. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

For more than twenty years, the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument has generated more controversy than any other unit administered by the National Park Service. Amateur historians belonging to the Little Big Horn Associates—angry because their overpriced, vanity press books were not sold in the park bookstore—had the staff investigated for alleged anti-Custer bias. At the same time, increasingly belligerent Native American activists protested that the site of their ancestors' greatest victory was being run as a shrine to the frontier military.

In 1988, Russell Means and other militants from the American Indian Movement stormed onto the battlefield and desecrated the granite monument marking the mass grave of the troopers who fell with George Armstrong Custer on 25 June 1876. Fearful of provoking violence, park officials failed either to stop or prosecute Means. Indeed, the National Park Service eventually moved to mollify its Indian critics by instituting interpretive programs that de-emphasize Custer and pay more attention to his Sioux and Cheyenne enemies.

To legitimize the "Indianization" of the Little Big Horn battlefield, selected scholars were invited to a symposium in Billings, Montana, in August 1994 to assist the park service in achieving "greater objectivity in conveying to the public the powerful and inherently controversial story at Little Bighorn" (xv). That gathering resulted in the sixteen papers comprising this book.

Despite its politically correct origins, most of the scholarship in *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* is sound and remarkably perceptive. John D. McDermott candidly highlights the political pressures behind the park service's revision of its interpretive programs. Anthropologist Margot Liberty demonstrates the value of Indian oral accounts

of the battle, while acknowledging the difficulty of obtaining and interpreting them. Colin G. Calloway argues that the Little Bighorn not only pitted white men against red, but also Indians against Indians. Custer's Arikara and Crow scouts fought for survival and revenge against tribes that had decimated and dispossessed their own people. In a typically provocative piece, archaeologist Richard A. Fox Jr. challenges the traditional view of the location of the Sioux and Cheyenne village on the day Custer died. John P. Hart makes effective use of communication theory to explore the past, present, and probable future of Custer myths.

Curiously, *Legacy* contains no appraisal of the voluminous and increasingly sophisticated research done on Custer himself since 1976—no doubt a reflection of the park service's desire to distance itself from a controversial figure who has been vilified by Native Americans. While *Legacy* should serve as a useful guide for the future development of the Little Bighorn battlefield, it also stands as a monument to the power of political agitation to manipulate a public agency charged with safeguarding this nation's heritage.

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