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# Crow History 1700-1950: A Political and Social Battle to Retain their Culture

Alden Big Man Jr.

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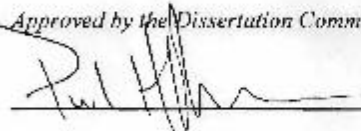
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**CROW HISTORY 1700 - 1950: A POLITICAL AND  
SOCIAL BATTLE TO RETAIN THEIR CULTURE**

**BY**

**ALDEN BIG MAN JR.**

B.A., Rocky Mountain College, Billings MT., 1999  
M.A., University of New Mexico, 2001

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
History**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2011**

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In the Crow Nation, an achievement such as mine is shared with the community as a whole. Customarily, the first order of business is to give four gifts to a clan mother and father. However, because of my proximity to home, this task must wait, but as a Crow, much thanks goes to those Clan parents that have given many prayers for my success throughout my life. Secondly, my heartfelt thanks have to go to two men who have supported me throughout my college career, always giving encouragement and constructive criticism during hard times. Without the unquestioned support from Dr. Paul Andrew Hutton, whom I view as a Father figure, and Dr. Timothy P. McCleary, a Clan Brother, I would not be at this point in my life, and so to both of you I say A'ho.

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often, I remembered the words of my mother “Make me Proud!” This work is dedicated to my family, especially my mother Peggy Little Light Big Man, “I love and Miss you.”

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**ABSTRACT**

In my dissertation, “Crow History 1700 – 1950: A Political and Social Battle to Retain their Culture,” I argue that the Social and Familial Kinship system utilized by the Crow is unique, and helped the Crows to preserve much of their Culture throughout the turbulent times of direct contact and assimilation. In this research I examine the movement of the Crows from eastern woodlands onto the Northern Plains, with an emphasis on the separation from the parent tribe. I argue the Crow purposely create a new and unique maternally based social and familial kinship system because of the separation from the parent tribe resulting in the formation of the modern day Crow Nation. During the period of European Contact, I explore the interaction of the Crow with the various newcomers such as the Sioux and the Europeans, and argue that the Crow lived within the world of the Plains Indians, but also adapted to new world thrust upon them by the Europeans. Because of the social and familial system, the Crows were able to survive the assaults, both physically and socially which were intended to exterminate the Crow from the Northern Plains. The areas of critical examination include



the various treaties, the late reservation period, and events that helped to retain the Culture of the Crow such as tribal politics and gatherings such as Crow Fair. My main argument is that the Crow reacted to major events in Crow history according to their social-familial system, and as a result, made significant choices resulting in the survival of the Crow Nation. Because the Crow were able to conceptualize their world completely, they reacted accordingly which helped them to continue to remain a strong and unique nation among many nations.

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# Introduction

In May of 2008, President Barack Obama, then on the campaign trail for the presidency, made a visit to the Crow Reservation.<sup>1</sup> Although there are over 500 tribes in the United States, with seven of them located in Montana, Obama had decided on visiting the Crow. Although Montana has always been a Republican state, Obama, in an attempt to persuade Indian Country to vote Democrat selected the Crow Nation as a stopping point to accomplish this goal. This caused me to ask several questions including, “Why the Crow?” Was it because of the fact that the Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument is located on the reservation or was it because the Crow had always been on friendly terms with the U.S. Government? Or maybe there was something else that made the Crow so appealing to Obama and his bid for presidency. Maybe it was this “something” that had drawn not only the future president of the United States to Crow Country, but also a long list of scholars’ eager to study this tribe. Not only do the Crow retain much of their language, but they also hold a unique social event every year that draws thousands of people from around the world known as Crow Fair. The celebration has never been intended for commercial purposes, but is actually an event that unintentionally has preserved a unique and distinct culture.<sup>2</sup>

The Crow or Apsaalooke have always been an intriguing people, and once the expansion of Euro-Americans intensified, they were sought after for their fine robes and ornaments by traders and trappers. The Grand Entrance they exhibited when they

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<sup>1</sup> Billings Gazette, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Rick and Susie Graetz, Rick and Susie Graetz, *This is Montana: A Geography –Geographic history of Montana, Volume 1* (Northern Rockies Publishing: Helena, MT, 2003), 17.

approached a village or post set them apart from other tribes.<sup>3</sup> Many of the early explorers that encountered the Crow were greatly impressed with their stature and ability as warriors. As a result, many of the literate explorers kept detailed accounts of the Crow and their customs. One glaring question many of them had was where did the Crow come from? Not much however, had been ascertained since the Crow worldview was contained within the geographic boundaries they were constantly hunting and living within. In essence, it appeared the Crow had come from the ground which they stood upon.

Estimates suggest the Crow split from a parent tribe around 1450 to 1550 and moved onto the plains to become one of the most historically recognized tribes on the northern plains.<sup>4</sup> They were not originally known as Crows before the move onto the plains, but oral history suggests that they were part of a parent tribe that moved from the eastern woodlands, and finally made it to what is now Devil's Lake in North Dakota.<sup>5</sup> Once the Crow split from the parent tribe they formed what is now known as the Crow Nation, and from there began to develop a unique and distinct identity that set them apart from the other plains tribes. Like many of the surrounding tribes, they relied on the buffalo for their existence for everything including food, clothing, shelter and tools. The

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<sup>3</sup> Fred Voget, *They call me Agnes: A Crow Narrative Based on the life of Agnes Yellowtail Deernose*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), xvi-xvii.

<sup>4</sup> For an estimate on their arrival on the northern plains see Joseph Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of Crow Country: The Crow Indians Own Stories* (New York: Orion books, 1992), 1-2; Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935*, 36-41. The trade network involving the Crow can be found in Chapter 2 of Preston Holders, *The hoe and the horse on the plains: a study of Cultural development among North American Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).: Michael Gregg, *An overview of the Prehistory of Western and Central North Dakota* (Billings, Mont: Bureau of Land Management, Cultural Resources Series, No. 1, 1985), 4-67.

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive account of the migration story see Alden Big Man Jr. "Curley: Crow Scout for Custer," (Master's Thesis: University of new Mexico, 2001), 2-5.

buffalo was an animal that moved about the plains in search of forage, which allowed tribes to follow the animal as it moved.

As other tribes began to recognize the importance of the buffalo, they, too, began to move onto the plains. This eventually resulted in tribes coming across one another as they followed the herds, resulting in inter-tribal warfare. This culture, known as the buffalo culture, soon emerged, slowly forcing the Indians to live a certain way, usually dictated by the movements of the buffalo. The animal continued to be the focal point of plains tribes until their near extinction in the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Like many other tribes, the Crow took the animal and made it the center of their lives, culturally, socially, economically and spiritually.

By the mid-seventeenth century, a new introduction onto the plains added and accelerated the culture that was in place. The horse, a European introduction, slowly made its way to the Crows and other northern tribes from the south. The Comanche, a relative of the Shoshone Indians, quickly realized the importance of the animal and moved southward, becoming a major part of the introduction of the horse onto the northern plains. By 1735, the Crow had obtained the horse and fully incorporated the animal into their society.<sup>7</sup> The animal immediately impacted the Crows in every aspect of their life. It allowed them to increase their mobility, made hunting easier, helped to increase the population of the Crow and affected their economic, social and religious practices as well.

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<sup>6</sup> The demise of the buffalo can be found in Mari Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of the hide men*, (New York: Hastings House, 1954).

<sup>7</sup> For the acquisition of the horse by the Crow see Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of Crow Country*, 13.

In essence, the animal helped to accelerate their lifestyle, while preserving the culture of the Plains Indian.<sup>8</sup> This is especially true for the Crow as the animal helped to save them from annihilation by surrounding enemy tribes by giving them mobility, and made them key horse traders, allowing them to obtain weapons in exchange for horses. The horse culture, as it was known, helped the Crow resist the onslaught of invasion, first from surrounding tribes, and then Euro-Americans. By becoming allies with the Whites, and serving as scouts for the U. S. military, the Crow were able to help remove enemy tribes from Crow country, which resulted in a somewhat peaceful state.<sup>9</sup>

The friendship began in the summer of 1825, when the Atkinson-O'Fallon Expedition visited the Crow with the intention of signing a treaty of friendship. The United States, still in its infancy, attempted to assert their authority over the unruly tribes in the West, while at the same time securing trade with them as well. An expedition was sent to meet and persuade various tribes such as the Crow to sign the treaty. The Jackson administration [1828-1836] wanted to ensure that American fur traders cornered the trade, while at the same time gaining the loyalty of the numerous tribes that existed in the West.<sup>10</sup> While concluding the treaty, a little disagreement broke out resulting in the Crow chief Red Plume being struck in the head with the butt of a pistol. A full scale war was on the horizon as warriors and soldiers prepared to fight, but General Atkinson, who had

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<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth overview of the impact of the Horse on the Plains Indians see Pekka Hamalainen "The Rise and fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (December, 2003): 833-862.

<sup>9</sup> See Alden Big Man Jr. "Curley: Crow Scout for Custer," (Master's Thesis: University of New Mexico, 2001), 49.50.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 61-65.

left to eat lunch, returned to restore peace.<sup>11</sup> After gifts were given to the Crow, both parties hurried off to avoid further hostilities between them.

However, most people studying Crow history fail to recognize the significance of this event, and instead focus on the treaty while fail to examine the aftermath, especially from the Crow perspective. The Crows' love of war and the weak state of the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition would have made it an easy target, but why then did the Crows not attack and finish them off? The United States was laughable as far as power went in the West, and more importantly Crow chiefs would have easily garnered enough support to finish off the expedition, but curiously opted not to. One of the possible reasons is that the Chiefs had given their word, and with the significance of gift giving in public to the Crows, they were obligated to hold their promises. Furthermore, they did not understand the dynamics of American politics, much like other tribes, and they trusted the American representatives. They also desired opening trade with the newcomers. However, it is likely that the Crow chiefs were able to contain their warriors, many of whom were eager to gain fame and ascend into power by proving their abilities in war. The control over the warriors is a direct result of the Crow Kinship-System that was in place. The system obligated every tribal member to behave in a certain manner, because they were representing not only their immediate family but also their clan, band and the tribes as a whole. It is likely Red Plume may have requested other chiefs and their followers not to engage the Americans and to hold up the promise of peace. Because of the system utilized by the Crow, if Red Plumes' wishes were not followed and warriors struck out on their own to avenge the disgrace of their chief, it would not only disgrace their family,

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

but also the chief himself.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the Crow likely maintained peace and cemented the social-familial system as the center of their world, while becoming allies with the whites. This eventually proved invaluable for the Crow.

By the mid nineteenth century, the Crow and other tribes found themselves living in a tightening circle. With the introduction of the horse, gun and foreign diseases, such as small pox, the outlook for the Crow did not appear promising. Many people predicted the Crow would cease to exist because of various factors, including the desire for war and the increase of diseases.<sup>13</sup> The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 came at a time that benefitted the Crows tremendously. While tribes began crowding into Crow hunting grounds, they fiercely fought to keep their shrinking lands. The treaty somewhat delayed the onslaught of the invasion by surrounding tribes, such as the Lakota, Assiniboine and the Blackfeet Indians. The treaty established boundaries, secured passage for White pioneers and more importantly brought a period of peace to the Crow.<sup>14</sup> This allowed them to flourish as a tribe and continue to develop their culture, including the Social and Kinship systems. However, not all was peaceful as attempts were made by surrounding tribes to exterminate the Crow. In the latter part of the 1850s, armed with British guns, the Blackfeet attacked the Crow at the Battle of Grapevine Creek. Fortunately, the invaders were repelled and the Crow continued to exist as a people.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For an explanation on Social-Familial obligations see Dale Old Horn and Timothy McCleary, *Apsaalooke Social and Family Structure*, (Crow Agency: Little Big Horn College, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> The demise of the Crow can be found in Herman Viola, *Little Bighorn Remembered: The untold Indian story of Custer's Last Stand* (New York: Times, books, 1999), 107. Edward S. Curtis also discusses the possibility of the Indian disappearing in his book, *The North American Indian: The complete portfolios*, (New York: Aperture, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Tim Bernardis, *Crow Social Studies: A teachers guide*, (Crow Agency: Bilingual Materials Development Center, School District 17H, 1986), 27-28.

<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth account of the Battle see Frederick Hoxie and Frank Rzczkowski, *Grapevine Creek Battle* (Crow Agency: Crow Tribal Council and The National Park Service, 1997).



In 1868 another treaty was concluded at Fort Laramie defining the boundaries of the Crow reservation. This treaty again allowed the Crow to live in relative peace, even throughout the Sioux outbreak and war against the U.S. government. The focus of the Sioux was on the Bozeman Trail forts, and this left little time for them to worry about the Crows. So instead of fending off the Sioux and Blackfeet, the Crow now focused their attention on the Blackfeet alone.<sup>16</sup> Again, this gave the Crows a chance to flourish amidst turmoil experienced by surrounding tribes. The Crow for the most part, were not at full scale war with the surrounding tribes, nor with the U.S. government but remained at relative peace. There were the occasional raids and counter raids, but the focus of their lives was centered on living as Crows. They incorporated various aspects of Euro-American culture, while maintaining their own, to create a unique society as they headed into the tumultuous era of the reservation period.

Every aspect of Crow life was attacked by U.S. officials in an attempt to change the way Crows lived in the 1880's. With most tribes now securely on reservations, the government could begin to assimilate Indians into white society. In 1887, Wraps-His-Tail, a young Crow warrior, made the only physical attempt to remove American Officials from the reservation, but his attempt failed. The only Crow-white confrontation had been unsuccessful by Wraps-His-Tail and resulted in the government stepping up their efforts to replace Crow culture with Anglo culture.<sup>17</sup> The areas that were the focus of change included language, religion, education, dress as well as other aspects of Crow culture. However, the social and familial system in place remained intact as Crows found other avenues to celebrate their culture. With dwindling numbers, due to diseases and

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<sup>16</sup> Bernardis, *Crow Social Studies*, 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> For the full account of the Wraps-His-Tail incident see Collin Calloway, "Swordbearer and the Crow Outbreak' of 1887," 36, 4(1986): 38-51.

poverty, the Crow future seemed uncertain until 1904, when the first Industrial Fair was introduced by the Indian agent as he attempted to nudge the Crow along into taking up farming and ranching.

Unknowingly, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had organized an event that helped the Crow cling to the last remnants of Crow culture by preserving the Social and Kinship system that was in place before the arrival of the Whites in Crow Country. The annual celebration took a short hiatus in its infancy, but it was continued with full force, especially under the supervision of the first Crow Indian Superintendent, Robert Yellowtail.<sup>18</sup> The fair included various events, such as horse racing, parades, a camp crier, Sham Battles and for a brief period a re-enactment of the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Although Yellowtail's goal was to give the reservation an economic boom, the Fair took on a life of its own as it evolved into an event that helped the Crows to reinvent themselves on an annual basis. Although many aspects of Crow culture had been lost, or dissolved because of the lack of use, the Social and Kinship systems remain strong today. This work will attempt to explain the conscious decisions made by Crow leaders throughout their history in an attempt to preserve the Crow people and their culture.

In order to gain a better understanding of the Crow culture, the reader must first gain a basic understanding of the Crow language, as the language is critical in understanding the thought process of the Crow people. Early researchers have come to the conclusion that for a person to fully understand the Crow culture, he/she must have an in-depth understanding of the Crow language. "After repeated revision I came to the conclusion that nothing short of a perfect knowledge of the Crow language would suffice

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<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth account of Yellowtail, see Robert S. Yellowtail Sr., *Robert Summers Yellowtail*. Albuquerque: Cold Type Service of New Mexico, 1973.

for a perfect list of terms of Consanguinity and affinity. For, in addition to the common enough multiplicity of meanings for any one term when translated into English, the student of the Crow has to deal with distinct native terms expressing delicate shades of meaning that are fully known only to the older Indians,” observed anthropologist Robert Lowie.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of understanding the Crow language, it is imperative to comprehend a few major components of the language, which can make it easier for non-Crow speakers to understand the Social and Familial system utilized by the Crow. The three elements most critical include the alphabet, the phonetic rules and the accent. These offer an insight into the language. Although the language is not that simple, for the purpose of this work focusing on these three elements will help explain the culture of the Crow Nation.

### **THE CROW ALPHABET**

Although important and necessary, Robert Lowie’s attempt to break down and interpret the language in terms of English formats is confusing to the average reader. The consonants and vowels are quite simple, but the confusion starts when Lowie attaches phrases to identify Continental vowels, parasitic vowels, Obscure vowels, and palatalized stops.<sup>20</sup> Without proper linguistic training, readers likely became frustrated by Lowie’s attempt to simplify the Crow language.

Fortunately, Crow speakers, along with other linguists, further simplified Lowie’s initial findings resulting in the following breakdown, which is simpler and understandable. There are 12 vowels in the Crow alphabet which include 5 short vowels,

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<sup>19</sup> Lowie, *Crow Social Life*, 208.

<sup>20</sup> Lowie, *Social Organizations*, 181 – 182.

a, e, i, o, u and seven long vowels that are aa, ee, ii, oo, uu, ia and ua. The last two, ia and ua are called diphthongs, and are more complex sounds made by gliding continuously from one vowel sound to another within the same syllable.<sup>21</sup> Examples of the diphthongs used in words are cafeteria and Nashua. The short vowels sound the same as the vowels in the English language, while the long vowels are drawn out longer. Furthermore, what makes the language a little more complicated is that some of the long vowels, like ee and ii take on a different sound. For example, the ee takes on more of an a sound like in the word able, and the ii assumes an e sound much like in the word beat.<sup>22</sup>

### **PHONETIC RULES FOR THE CROW LANGUAGE**

There are six “Phonetic Rules for the Crow Language,” critical in pronouncing words properly.

#### 1. P

A double letter p (pp), and a p at the beginning of a word has a p sound the same as in English.

EXAMPLE: Paa`k – The P at the beginning of the word is pronounced as a p.

Hu`uppiia – The pp in the middle of the word is pronounced as a p sound.

When the letter p is between vowels, it is sounded similar to the English letter b as in baby.

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<sup>21</sup> Edith C. Kates and Hu Matthews *Crow Language Learning Guide* (Hardin School District 17H and 1: Hardin MT., 1980), 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

EXAMPLE: Baape` – The p found between the vowels sound the same as the b at the beginning of the word.

## 2. K

At the Beginning or end of a ward, k has the same sound as in English, and a double k (kk) has a strong k sound.

EXAMPLE: Che`kkee – the kk in the middle of the word, although between vowels still sounds like a k.

Ko`shik – The k at the beginning and end of the word retains the k sound.

When the k is between vowels, it will sound like a g.

EXAMPLE: baaka`ate – the k found between vowels takes on a g sound in this word.

If the k is preceded by ch, sh, e, eh, ee, eeh, i, ih, ii, iih, it will have a gy sound to it. Also, the y is a lesser sound than the g, as though it were a small or even tiny y, gy. This combination is not exemplified in an English word, but the first letter of the English word cute has a y sound that is not shown in the spelling.

EXAMPLE: shika`ake – The first k is preceded by an i, while the second is between vowels. As a result the first k will take on a gy sound while the second k takes on a g sound.

### 3. T

The t will keep the t sound at the beginning of a word as it does in English. However, when the letter t is between vowels, or is preceded by an h or an x, it sounds somewhat like the English letter d.

EXAMPLE: Tate`ek- The t at the beginning will remain a t sound, but the t in between vowels will take on a d sound. In the word Kalaaxta`k, the t is preceded by an x so it will take on a d sound.

A double t (tt) will keep a strong t sound,

EXAMPLE: Bu`attee – The tt, although between vowels remains a t sound.

### 4. S

The letter s at the beginning of a word, or a double s (ss) has an English S sound to it.

EXAMPLE: sa`ake – The s at the beginning of the word remains an s

sound as does the double ss in the word iaxassee.

When the s is between vowels it takes on a Z sound, much like the s sound in the English word Easy.

EXAMPLE: Sasi`a – The S at the beginning stays an S sound while the s between vowels takes on a Z sound.

## 5. CH

When Ch is at the beginning or end of a word, it sounds as the English Ch in Chicken or Church. Also, when Ch follows a P, it retains the Ch sound.

EXAMPLE: Chili`ak – The Ch at the beginning of this word will retain the Ch sound, and in the word Bu`upche, the ch, because it is preceded by a P will remain a Ch sound.

When the Ch is between vowels, or is preceded by an H or X, it will take on a J sound.

EXAMPLE: E`hchek – Since the Ch is preceded by an H, it will sound like a J.

A double Ch is spelled Tch and remains a Ch sound.

EXAMPLE: Bi`tchiia – The Tch is a double Ch, and stays a Ch sound.

## 6. SH

The letter SH at the beginning or end of a word is similar to the Sh sound in English Words.

EXAMPLE: Shika`ake – Since the Sh is at the beginning of the word the Sh will remain an Sh sound.

The Sh between vowels will be similar to the S sound like in the English word Pleasure, almost between a z and s sound. A double Sh is spelled as Ssh, and remains an Sh sound.

EXAMPLE: Ilu`sshishik – The Ssh after the U will remain an Sh sound, while the Sh between vowels will take on the S sound much like that in the word Pleasure.



## ACCENT IN THE CROW LANGUAGE

With few exceptions, every word in Crow has an accent which is essential for meaning, pronunciation, and spelling. The accent indicates the stress of the word, or the part of the word that is spoken loudest. Without an accent, the string of letters is not a word. Also, the accent ( ` ) is found directly above the letter. However, because this cannot be done in the Word program, it immediately follows the letter it should be above. Also, there is actually no break in between the letters where the accent is placed so the words should be pronounced continuously. EXAMPLE: A`lee should be Alee.\*\*\*\*\*

### EXAMPLES:

A`hpee – Evening      Da`asuua – your house      Daasu`ua Their hearts

The Accent also determines the Pitch; that is, the melody goes up or is falling. On long vowels and diphthongs (aa,ee,ia, oo, ua, uu) when the accent is on the first of the double vowels the pitch falls.

### EXAMPLES:

Chika`achik – He/She sowed it      Da`apxik – He/She bit it.

When the accent is on the second of the double vowels or diphthong, the pitch rises slightly. The accent is placed on the highest part of the double vowel.

EXAMPLES:

Chii`k – He/She carried it on his back. Chiwee` - Tell or relate.

When the short vowel has the accent, it isn't longer as in the long vowels above, it is just said louder, or stressed more than the other letters.

EXAMPLE:

Xalu`sshiik – He/She ran.<sup>23</sup>

With the basic understanding of these few rules, the reader can gain a better understanding of the language utilized by the Crows.

With the basic understanding of these few rules, the reader can gain a better understanding of the language utilized by the Crows.

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<sup>23</sup> The three elements of Crow Language I have discussed can be found in detail in Edith C. Kates and Hu Matthews *Crow Language Learning Guide* (Hardin School District 17H and 1: Hardin MT., 1980), 1-6.

## Chapter 1: Apsaalooke Annualaalia,

### “The Coming of the Crows”

The American Indian in United States history has always been a controversial subject because of the way Euro-Americans interacted and handled relations with Native peoples. Much has been written about the dealings with the Indian but most writings are from the perspective of the Euro-Americans. A few, such as Helen Hunt Jackson, actually humanize the American Indian, often pointing out the deficiencies of American Indian policy. She states, “The great difficulty with the Indian problem is not with the Indian, but with the Government and people of the United States.”<sup>24</sup> The pattern of forcing Indians off their homelands and confining them to smaller worthless reservations is common among all tribes. The removal of the Indians was believed to be for the benefit of the Indian, but if they refused, the newcomers used military force to subdue any kind of resistance. Politicians were well aware of how unfair the policies were toward the Indians but never publicly admitted it. Jackson however, publicized the unfair dealings, making keen observations, such as how the government policy included removal but not proper care, or of how, “We have encroached upon their means of subsistence without furnishing them any proper return.”<sup>25</sup> This theme was repeated in most tribal histories and it has been that way since Christopher Columbus stumbled upon the New World in 1492, and ended in 1890 when the Wounded Knee Massacre took place. The massacre marked the official end to any type of physical armed resistance from the Indians.

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<sup>24</sup> Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with some of the Indian Tribes* (Corner House publishers: Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1979), 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

A few years after Wounded Knee, a statement made by a young historian named Frederick Jackson Turner put an official end to any idea that the American West was still untamed. Turner believed that the frontier line that once existed out west was now all but gone. He believed that the frontier line was where savagery met civilization and it was the area of free land. This concept was reflective of the belief that as the frontier line moved further west a manufacturing civilization replaced a primitive civilization.<sup>26</sup> As a result, it put into motion the idea that the Indians once subdued, peacefully accepted living like the white man. Once the Indians, were securely confined to reservations America could now begin to look beyond its borders to make their mark on the world.

As the United States eased into the world stage and began to expand its influence outside the U.S., the presence of the American Indian that once dominated the media was all but gone. To a foreigner looking in, it may have appeared the Indians had quietly assimilated and readily accepted this new way of life. Indian history appeared to have vanished with only a few instances when an individual popped up to represent the entire race, but otherwise the modern era grossly neglected the continuing Indian struggle. In *Custer Died for Your Sins* Vine Deloria Jr. writes, “The deep impression made upon American minds by the Indian Struggle against the white man in the last century made the contemporary Indian somewhat invisible compared with his ancestors. Today Indians are not conspicuous by their absence from view. Yet they should be.”<sup>27</sup> To some it may appear that Indians accepted the fact they had to live like Euro-Americans and readily accepted assimilation. However, many tribes in the United States struggled to assert their

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<sup>26</sup> Richard W. Etulain, *Does the Frontier Experience make America Exceptional?* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999), 19.

<sup>27</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 12.

sovereignty and gain their freedom from American rule. They constantly made attempts to change their future, which was bleak at best, and turn it into one of self-control and prosperity.

Unfortunately, little has been written about these struggles since 1890 and even more frustrating is the fact that when any kind of Indian history is written it usually involved an Indian Hero. Heroes like Jim Thorpe, Ira Hayes or Billy Mills dominate Indian history because they supposedly represent the so called Indian struggle. Their stories are common for Indians who break free from the reservations and make it in the white world. They become Indian heroes, and soon non-Indians feel that all Indians should be like them. In most Indian nations however, people like Billy Mills or Ira Hayes are not considered heroes. They have heard of these people, but they also understand that they are of a different nation and Indians usually recognize heroes from within their own tribe. For example, if a Crow were asked what Crazy Horse meant to them they would likely remember some story told to them by a Crow elder of how a great-grandfather had defeated or been defeated by him. They would not consider him a hero but think of him as a member of the Lakota nation, an enemy of the Crow.

For this reason researching and writing Indian history becomes quite complex and often frustrating. Indians do not consider themselves to be Indian in general, but rather a part of an independently recognized tribe. Most professionals writing Indian history begin to think of them as one common people. And so, Indian history is written to include all the various tribes inhabiting one region such as those found on the northern plains. Various tribes may have similar histories or backgrounds, but they likely will not identify themselves as anything other than the tribe they were born into.

Also, in examining Indian history other challenges emerge for several reasons. Firstly, due in large part to the mistrust most Indians have of whites, many do not share their histories in depth. They fear that the stories they share may become distorted and hurt their integrity and credibility within the tribe. Secondly, because all nations considered themselves individual from one another, they do not recognize individuals from other nations as heroes or representatives like non-Indians do. Finally, because many nations still hold mistrust for the United States government, they refuse to share their stories and, as a result, they become a part of a generalized history, and as the older generation passes on a great part of tribal histories are lost forever.

Fortunately, some tribes like the Crow took a different path in creating a history representative of their unique and distinct culture. They adopted certain aspects of Euro-American culture that fit within their own beliefs and dismissed others that did not conform to their culture. Because the Crow were able to maintain a unique relationship with the foreigners who entered lands controlled by the Crow, they maintained some control of their fate. Other tribes viewed this as selling out to the whites, but because the Crow understood what the future was going to be like with the advancement of white civilization they adapted accordingly. They knew what was coming, and it was nothing new for the Crow to adapt to their surroundings, as it is evident in their history.

Many predicted that they would soon cease to exist because larger surrounding tribes wanted them gone from the plains and the face of the earth. Many visitors to the Crow made the prediction that they would soon be wiped out. Trader Edwin Thomas Denig, a representative of the American Fur Company, stated, "Situated as they are now, the Crows cannot exist long as a nation without adequate supplies of arms and

ammunition, warred against the Blackfeet on one side and most bands of the Sioux on the other.”<sup>28</sup> He based his prediction on several factors, such as being greatly outnumbered and also because they appeared to be outgunned. Fortunately, the Crow were able to make certain adjustments so that they could survive throughout the most intense era of warfare on the northern plains. At the same time they were able to maintain their stronghold on their lands because of their determination and intellect in dealing with both whites and Indians.

For these reasons it can be argued that the Crow are one of the most unique nations in the U. S. because they were able to maintain their culture and language while sustaining their identity in the midst of policies such as assimilation. It is because of this that a study is needed to examine why the Crows were able to retain their culture as opposed to other tribes that lost theirs.

In this work I will attempt to examine and explain the reasons behind why the Crow were successful in keeping their language and culture intact. To fully understand the world of the Crow a look into their past is first needed. Also, a look into the way they incorporated other cultural traits and tools into their own is significant in explaining how they survived for so long, especially during an intense period of unrest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Special attention has to be made to how they viewed their world and how they came to be exactly in the right place.

## **Crow History: Pre 1700s**

Presently the Crow nation calls a 2.2 million acre reservation in southeastern Montana home. There are about 13,000 enrolled members with over half still living on

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<sup>28</sup> Edwin Thomas Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, edited with an introduction by John c. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 71.

or near the reservation. Within its boundaries a visitor will find a land rich in history with many aspects of American history passing through or intersecting there. Several of Montana's major attractions can be found on the Crow reservation. In 1876 a combined force of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors successfully defeated George Armstrong Custer and the Seventh Cavalry.<sup>29</sup> The site where the battle occurred is located about one mile south of the main administration building of the Crow people in Crow Agency. Twenty-miles west of the town of Crow Agency flow the waters of the Big Horn River, one of the top trout fisheries in the country. When visitors arrive to these destinations most do not realize they are on an Indian Reservation. Many visitors have heard of Custer, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull but few have heard of No Vitals, or Long Hair, who are heroes in Crow history. Nor do many realize that buffalo jumps can be found close by, or that the Crows still retain much of their language. This is in large part because most visitors have learned Indian history from text books that neglect these facts. In order for anyone to understand Crows, they must first look at their history and try to understand the actions of the Crow.

When studying native North America, professionals like historians and anthropologists divide the history of this region into three distinct eras. The first being pre-history, which includes the time before European arrival onto the North American continent. The next is termed proto-history that begins when Indians obtain cultural items from Europeans but never made contact. Finally, history is considered the time when they made first contact with the foreign peoples, and these contacts were recorded

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<sup>29</sup> For a brief interpretive overview of the Battle of the Little Big Horn see, Robert M. Utley, *Little Big Horn Battlefield: A History and Guide to The Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Washington D. C.: Division of Publications, National Park Service, 1994).



in writing.<sup>30</sup> It has to be stressed that history began differently for native peoples living in varying regions of the continental U. S. because they did not come into contact with Europeans at the same time. For tribes that claimed territories on what is considered the northern plains, they were one of the last groups to have European contact.

For the purpose of this work the story will begin by looking at the history of the Crow from the latter portion of pre-history and move quickly through proto-history. The main focus of this work will be targeted toward major events in Crow history, with the bulk examining how the Social and Kinship systems remained intact. Most of the pre and proto-histories of the native peoples will have many similarities, while the history will greatly differ because of the structure of the various nations. Tribes in the west will also have a different history in part because of the time when they encounter the Europeans. Because the west was not significant in early American history we see many eastern tribes interacting openly with the whites, while in the west the interaction was limited to explorers and fur trappers. Fortunately a large body of documentation exists from these visitors that, when combined with oral accounts of Crow history, allows a thorough look into their past to be written.

## **Pre-history**

The pre-history of the Crow is quite intriguing because much of the oral history can be corroborated with archaeological evidence. Drawing on the research and corroboration of oral history, the Crow proper inhabited Wyoming and Montana for at least 500 years and possibly longer.<sup>31</sup> Evidence, primarily archaeological, suggests the

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy P. McCleary, "Ghosts on the Land: Apsaaloke (Crow Indian) interpretations of Rock Art" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana 2008), 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

ancestral Crow people were in Montana as early as A. D. 1150, then in Saskatchewan by A.D. 1300, and by the time Christopher Columbus' unintended discovery of the New World, the Crows were as far south as the Central Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming.<sup>32</sup> By comparing oral history and archeological evidence, professionals can trace the ancestors of the Crow and Hidatsa back even further.

Professionals believe the Crow were once living in the eastern woodlands in the area of what is now Minnesota, and probably even further east.<sup>33</sup> The Crow were not yet known as Crow but broke off from a parent tribe that included the Hidatsa. They initially moved west, likely because of severe drought conditions or some other environmental change, but eventually settled in the area of Devil's Lake in present-day North Dakota. The general belief is a band had broken off from the parent tribe and moved onto the plains and become dependent on the buffalo for their existence. The remaining members turned to farming and lived in earth lodges, eventually becoming known as the Hidatsa.<sup>34</sup> The first split is believed to have occurred in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and this group became the Mountain people, Awaaxamiilixpaaka.<sup>35</sup>

The mountain (Crow) band that transitioned onto the plains soon became dependent on the buffalo for every aspect of their survival. The buffalo was responsible for creating a new and unique culture known as Plains Indian. Robert H. Lowie, well known anthropologist, distinguishes the Plains Indians as different from surrounding tribes like the Basin and Plateau tribes. "The Plains peoples, then, were typically large-

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<sup>32</sup> McCleary, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Alfred W. Bowers, *Hidatsa Social and Ceremonial Organization* (Washington D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 20.

<sup>34</sup> Dale Old Horn and Timothy P. McCleary, *Crow Social Familial Kinship* (Crow Agency, MT: Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency 1995), 3. See also, Robert Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (New York: Irvington Publishers Inc., 1956), xiv.

<sup>35</sup> Lowie, *The Crow Indian*, 3-4.

game Hunters, dependent for a considerable part of their diet on buffalo and using buffalo hides and deerskins for clothing and receptacles,” writes Lowie in identifying Plains tribes.<sup>36</sup> The animal provided all the material needed for survival on the northern plains. The Crow used the hide; usually bull hides, for the tipi coverings, which consisted of up to sixteen hides being required for an average tipi. Clothing and bedding was also made of the hide, usually made by the women. The meat was either boiled or dried, allowing the meat to be preserved for long periods of time and consumed as needed. The sinew of the buffalo was used for several purposes, such as thread for the construction of tipi and clothing as well as bow strings for their bows. The hooves of the animal were melted down and used as glue while the horns served as cups. The head was usually used for ceremonial purposes such as fasting or in the Sundance.<sup>37</sup>

The hunting of the buffalo, if possible, was a community event and required rigid adherence to orders given by respective leaders. “Their laws for killing buffaloe (sic) are most rigidly enforced. No person is allowed to hunt buffalo in the vicinity where the village is stationed without first obtaining leave of the council,” observed Osborne Russell, who traded with the Crows.<sup>38</sup> This was in large part to the fact that the buffalo was the main staple in the economic stability of the Crow. Once the Crow obtained the horse, individuals were capable of hunting on their own, so long as they had a fast athletic horse that could maintain a fast speed and not tire easy. Most of the buffalo hunting tribes did not select just any horse from their herds, but rather were very careful in deciding on a horse to hunt with. The reason for this was that some horses had more

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<sup>36</sup> Robert H. Lowie, *Indians of the Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska press, 1954), 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Osborne Russell *Journal of a Trapper*, Aubrey L. Haines, ed. (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1955), 147.

endurance, and could keep up with the buffalo over longer distances, allowing the hunter to take careful aim at their target. This was done so that fewer shots were taken and less of the meat was damaged. Also, a horse had to be disciplined, meaning it could not spook in the midst of a herd of buffalo throwing the rider to get seriously injured or killed. For these reasons plains tribes were very protective of their prized horses, often keeping them in the camps rather than with the herd. As a result the buffalo allowed the Crow and other tribes to become full-time hunters and gatherers, while tribes such as the Mandan and Hidatsa were mainly farmers. As a result the first band that broke off from the parent tribe became the original Apsaalooke, or Mountain Crow.

A century later, a dispute occurred between the wives of two prominent chiefs. Apparently the quarrel began over the rights to the paunch of a killed buffalo. The wives both felt they had the rights to this portion of the animal and soon an all out confrontation ensued. Crow oral history suggests that the two chiefs were rivals in the tribe and the dispute further escalated the differences between the two leaders. Eventually the wives came to blows and the followers of the two chiefs soon took up arms and the situation became so intense that an all-out-war seemed inevitable. However, once cooler heads prevailed, the chiefs decided that they should split up and live apart from one another to avoid confrontation. One band eventually moved onto the plains and became the River Crow, or Minesapale.<sup>39</sup> It is quite possible that from this quarrel a new law was created by the buffalo hunting Crow to avoid future confrontations. Osborne Russell observed, “They generally kill their meat by surrounding a band of Buffaloe(sic) and when once enclosed but few escape – the first persons who arrive at a dead Buffaloe(sic) is entitled

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<sup>39</sup> Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading through History: The Making of the Crows Nation in America 1805 – 1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42.

to one third of the meat and if the person who killed it is the fourth one on the spot he only gets the hide and tongue but in no wise can he get more than one third of the meat if a second and third person appears before it is placed on the horses designed for packing.”<sup>40</sup> This method of dividing the meat likely ensured that everyone got meat but more importantly kept peace among the members of the tribe.

Like many cultures of the world the Apsaalooke have their own version as to how they came into existence. These stories are often complex and very extensive and can be confusing and frustrating to researchers of Crow History. However, one common theme that exists in the creation and migration of the Crow is how they believe that they are superior to everyone around them. This superiority complex becomes evident as they increasingly interact with literate peoples who record these histories.

The common belief among the Crow as to how they came to be on this earth has been passed down from generation to generation. Crow oral tradition suggests that Akbadadia (God) created the earth, then called forward the bravest of the ducks to retrieve mud from the bottom of the ocean. The Crow people say the Creator, Iichikbaalia, created the humans by instructing four ducks to go down into a body of deep water and retrieve mud from the bottom. The first three ducks failed, but after a long time, the fourth duck brought some mud from the bottom of the water. From this the Crow were formed. The Creator then breathed into his creation and for this reason Crow people say that speech or the word is sacred. Then he brought the Crow to a very clear spring and inside this spring they were shown a man with his bow drawn taught. The Creator said, "This is Crow people, I have made them to be small in number, but they will never be overcome by any outside force." The Crow people say that neither man nor

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<sup>40</sup> Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 147.

woman was made first, it is simply said that the Crow were created.<sup>41</sup> This belief in the origins of the Crow demonstrates an intense feeling of pride that exists even today.

Crow oral history suggests they moved onto the plains not by fate, but by divine guidance. Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow, the tribal historian for the Crow, did extensive research using both oral history as well as archaeological facts to piece together the most extensive account of the migration of the Crow. The migration onto the northern plains in Crow oral tradition is broken into two parts and is important to this work because it demonstrates the thinking of the Crows that they were chosen by God and destined for greatness.

The first story places the ancestral tribe in the eastern woodlands, possibly from what is now the Great Lakes region, or the Wisconsin area.<sup>42</sup> Due to an extreme drought four groups of warriors consisting of sixteen men were sent north, east, west and south in search of food. All the groups returned empty handed except the group from the west. They brought back buffalo meat which the tribe enjoyed, so it was decided that the tribe should move in that direction. Eventually they settled in the area around present-day Devils Lake (Spirit Lake) in North Dakota. The next phase of the migration involves two brothers named Red Scout and No Vitals [AKA No Intestines]. They fasted in hopes of gaining a vision as to how to lead their respective followers. Red Scout received a vision instructing him to move his people to an area on the Missouri River and plant corn, which became their main crop. No Vitals received a vision instructing him to seek out the

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<sup>41</sup> Old Horn and McCleary, *Apsáalooke Social and Family Structure*, 000. See also Philip Beaumont Jr. "Awekualawaachish" ( MA thesis: The University of Arizona, 1991), 15-16. For an extended version see Lowie's *Crow Indians* 122-133. As in many different cultures there will be a slight variance in the way the creation story is told but the overall story remains similar.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of Crow country: The Crow Indians' own stories* (New York: Orion books, 1992), 1.

sacred tobacco seed as well as a God-given homeland. No Vitals led his people west in search of the tobacco seed, which he found in the Big Horn Mountains, and it was at this point that the Crow believed they were in the right place.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most notable quotes in Crow history was given by Chief Alapooish, which is representative of the attitude Crows had about their traditional homelands. It demonstrates a strong sense of national pride which is evident even today. He explained to a fur trapper how he felt that Crow country was exactly in the right place stating:

“The Crow Country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place; while you are in it you fare well; whenever you go out of it, whichever way you travel, you will fare worse.

“If you go to the south, there you have to wander over great barren plains; the water is warm and bad, and you meet the fever and ague. To the north it is cold; the winters are long and bitter, and no grass; you cannot keep horses there, but must travel with dogs. What is a country without horses! On the Columbia they are poor and dirty, paddle about in canoes, and eat fish. Their teeth are worn out; they are always taking fishbones out of their mouths. Fish is poor food. To the east, they dwell in villages; they live well; but they drink the muddy water of the Missouri... that is bad. A Crow’s dog would not drink such water.”

“About the forks of the Missouri is a fine country; good water; good grass; plenty of buffalo. In summer, it is almost as good as the Crow country; but in the winter it is cold; the grass is gone; and there is no salt weed for the horses. The Crow Country is exactly in the right place. It has snowy mountains and sunny plains; all kinds of climates

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<sup>43</sup> McCleary, *Ghosts on the land*, 15 – 16. The most extensive account of the migration story is in Medicine Crow’s *From the Heart of Crow country*, p. 16 – 29.

and good things for every season. When the summer heats scorch the prairies, you can draw up under the mountains, where the air is sweet and cool, the grass fresh, and the bright streams come tumbling out of the snow banks. There you can hunt the elk, the deer, and the antelope, when their skins are fit for dressing; there you will find plenty of white bears and mountain sheep. In the autumn, when your horses are fat and strong from the mountain pastures, you can go down into the plains and hunt the buffalo, or trap beaver on the streams. And when winter comes on, you can take shelter in the woody bottoms along the rivers; there you will find buffalo meat for yourselves, and cottonwood bark for your horses; or you may winter in the Wind River valley, where there is salt weed in abundance. The Crow Country is exactly in the right place. Everything good is to be found there. There is no country like the Crow Country.”<sup>44</sup>

Once the Crow gained controlled of lands on the northern plains they found themselves fiercely fending off invaders. The three major tribes threatening the Crow were the various Teton Sioux tribes to the east and south, while the Assiniboines came down from the north. From the north and west lay the most formidable of all enemies, the Blackfeet nation.<sup>45</sup> Zenas Leonard, who was in the area of the Crow in 1834, reported the two tribes were “implacable enemies” in which “War was their only desire.”<sup>46</sup> Osborne Russell, another trapper, encountered several Crow raiding parties on their way to the Blackfeet in search of horses. He writes, “We had been here five days when a party of Crow Indians came to us consisting of 49 warriors. They were on their

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<sup>44</sup> “Exactly the Right Place,” last modified March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011, <http://thehumanfootprint.wordpress.com/2011/03/02/east-of-yellowstone-lies-the-absarokas-crow-country/>

<sup>45</sup> Frederick E. Hoxie and Frank Rzczkowski, *The Grapevine Creek Battle* (Crow Agency, MT: Crow Tribal Council, 1997), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Zenas Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, Milo Milton Quaife, ed. (Chicago: The Lake side Press, 1934) , 50.



way to the Blackfoot village to steal horse.” A few days later Russell and his party encountered another group of 110 warriors also on their way to the Blackfeet camp.<sup>47</sup> This constant raiding between the tribes lasted well into the end of the nineteenth century.

By the mid-seventeenth century however, the plains population had been altered considerably by indirect contact with Europeans. When early fur trappers and traders ventured into the west they encountered native peoples comfortably adapted to European goods, such as cloth, metal and glass beads. Introductions such as guns and the horse considerably altered the way in which the Crow lived. This era of dynamic change occurred during the eighteenth century and brought about intensity in hunting and warfare never before seen by these Indians. The vast trade network that existed prior to the arrival of Europeans was quite extensive and brought trade goods from great distances. The evidence of how involved the Crow were in the extensive trade network was demonstrated in the Journal of François Antoine Laroque. In 1805 he patiently waited with the Hidatsa for the Rocky Mountain Indians (Crows) as he planned on opening trade with them. On the day the Crow camp arrived he witnessed a procession that included hundreds of warriors carrying their weapons, shields and other belongings, serving as proof the Crows had incorporated European goods into their culture.<sup>48</sup>

The most significant introductions onto the plains, the horse and the gun were obtained sometime during the earlier part of the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> The horse proved to be a life altering introduction and the spread of the horse onto the northern plains was

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>48</sup> François Antoine Laroque, “Yellowstone Journal,” in W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Theissen eds., *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders Among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 170.

<sup>49</sup> McCleary, *Ghosts on the Land*, 12.

accomplished through trade and eventually full scale horse raids. The period between 1540 and 1880 is termed the Horse Culture period, beginning with the introduction and spread of the horse through the near extinction of the buffalo, which resulted in the loss of monetary value of the horse.<sup>50</sup> The horse spread first from southern tribes who obtained it from the Spanish. Tribes such as the Apaches traded the animal to tribes further north such as the Kiowa, Wichita and Shoshone, who in turn traded them to the Crow.

Eventually, the Crow became major players in the horse trade, bringing the animal to their distant relatives, the Mandan and Hidatsa. The Crows became quite wealthy in the horse trade business, owning thousands of the animals. In trading with their village dwelling relatives the Hidatsa, the Crow were able to obtain European goods by pricing the horse at double its value, which allowed the Crow to take more goods in exchange for the horse.<sup>51</sup> By the middle part of the eighteenth century virtually every tribe in the West had incorporated the horse into their daily lives.<sup>52</sup>

Interplay with the environment, buffalo and the horse quickly transformed the inhabitants of the Northern plains into a unique culture.<sup>53</sup> Preston Holder, author of the *Hoe and the Horse*, explains, “The acquisition of the horse must have increased the hunting range and the food potential of the villagers as well as extending the range of

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<sup>50</sup> John C. Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture: With Comparative Material From other Western Tribes*, in Smithsonian Institute Bureau of American Ethnology No. 159 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1955), 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Colin Callaway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* (Boston/New York: Bedford/ St. Martins, 1999), 277.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

trade contacts.”<sup>54</sup> For the Crow, the arrival of the horse quickly altered their economic, social and religious beliefs. More importantly the horse transformed the Crow from a walking people into a riding nation with the ability to move great distances in a short amount of time. Famed Crow Chief Plenty Coups following statement regarding his horse is clearly representative of the significance of the animal in Crow Culture. “To be alone with our war-horses at such a time teaches them to understand us, and us to understand them. My horse fights with me and fasts with me, because if he is to carry me in battle he must know my heart and I must know his or we shall never become brothers.”<sup>55</sup> Prior to the arrival of the horse, the dog was the main animal used to transport personal property.

Horses also allowed Plains tribes to increase the size of their tipis from about twelve feet in diameter to as much as twenty feet.<sup>56</sup> This likely increased the size of the average family occupying each tipi. In examining the number of members in each tribe it is clear that by 1780 most tribes had reached their peak, and numbers began to decrease as they entered the nineteenth century. For example, the Arapaho had approximately 3,000 members, but that number dropped to 1,241 by 1930. The Crow also experienced a large drop in their numbers from 1780 in which they had 4,000 members, but also were reduced to a little over 2,000 by the 1930's.<sup>57</sup> The drop in numbers is in large part due to diseases such as small pox because there was so much direct contact with surrounding tribes and Europeans, which was limited prior to the arrival of the horse.

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<sup>54</sup> Preston Holder, *The Hoe and the Horse* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska press, 1991), 28.

<sup>55</sup> Frank B. Linderman, *Plenty Coups: Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 100.

<sup>56</sup> McCleary, *Ghosts on the Land*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Lowie, *Plains Indian*, 10 -11.

The everyday life of Plains Indians like the Crow was altered with the introduction of the horse. The horse affected everyone, from the newborns through the elders, both male and female. Young boys were entrusted with the everyday care of the horse herds. Beginning from the time they awoke, the boys too young to go on hunting and war parties found themselves tending the family herd. They first rounded up the herd, making sure they were all accounted for, then pushed them to water and eventually set them out to pasture. As they matured many of these same boys were soon involved in the training of the horses. They would capture a wild horse, put on a bit and lead the horse to deep water or a muddy bog and begin the training process. The resistance from the water or mud tired the horse out and allowed the boys to stay on the horses back without getting hurt.<sup>58</sup> It was this type of interaction with the horse that created the special relationship Plains people enjoyed with their horses.

Although there was one Crow nation identified, the various bands that existed were independent of one another, and only came together for the autumn hunt or for protection against surrounding tribes. One common belief among these people was the profound belief that they were guided by the creator to the land they claimed as their own. Historically several names were used to identify the people now known as Crow Indians. Biiluuke, or Our Side is the term used by the Crows to refer to themselves in their own language. Apsaalooka, Absoroke or Absaruka is the term used by non-Crow to refer to this tribe now living in southeastern Montana.<sup>59</sup> The term Apsaalooka cannot be

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<sup>58</sup> Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Culture*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> In the Crow Language the proper spelling is the former while non-Indians tried to spell it according to sound. However, it is quite common for non-Crow speakers to replace the L in Apsaalooka with an R because in the Crow language the L is not emphasized, see Fred W. Voget, *They Call me Agnes; A Crow*

translated into the English language to fully represent the true meaning of the term. As the Crow increasingly interacted with visitors, several different names were applied to this tribe, while surrounding nations made the gesture of flapping their arms as to represent a bird in flight to refer to the Crow. The early fur trappers applied their own terms. The La Verendryes visiting them in 1743 termed them Beaux Hommes, or Handsome Men, while others referred to them as the Rocky Mountain Indians.<sup>60</sup> Still, others applied various terms to represent the Indians known today as the Apsaalooka. “The word Ap Sar Roo Kai, which is the name they give themselves in their own language, does not mean a crow more than any other kind of bird, the interpretation being simply anything that flies,” noted Edwin Thompson Denig in 1855.<sup>61</sup> The closest non-Indian translation was made by Robert Lowie, an anthropologist studying Crow Culture in 1931. He interpreted the meaning to represent a forked-tail bird similar to a blue jay or magpie.<sup>62</sup> However, Joseph Medicine Crow explains, “In the Hidatsa Language, Absarokee means Children of the Large-beaked Bird.”<sup>63</sup> Eventually the term Crow came to represent the Apsaalooka people of southeastern Montana.

Academic professionals classify the Crow as being part of a linguistic group that is defined as Siouan. Robert Lowie states, “In Speech the Crow are ‘Siouan’ i.e. related to the Sioux (Dakota) in the sense that English and Russian are both ‘Indo-European,’ for in either case only a philologist could prove any connection.”<sup>64</sup> In fact, once the Crow

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*Narrative Based on the life of Agnes Yellowtail Deernose* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), xiv.

<sup>60</sup> Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of the Crow Country*, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri* edited with an introduction by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 138.

<sup>62</sup> Lowie, *The Crow Indians*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of Crow Country*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 3-4.

moved onto the plains along with the Sioux, they became mortal enemies trying to oust the other from existence.

## **EARLY CROW / WHITE CONTACT**

Many of the Indian tribes in the West had enjoyed little interference from white men prior to the mid-nineteenth century. There were the occasional trappers and traders that ventured west seeking trade with the Indians. Meanwhile in the east a steady flow of immigrants poured into America slowly expanding westward in search of new lands and new beginnings. In the nineteenth century, beginning with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 the United States doubled in size. These two factors, the increase in immigrants and the doubling of American territory resulted in an influx of emigrants moving westward.<sup>65</sup>

The Crow, especially, had little contact with or need for the white men coming west. They were comfortably obtaining European goods through trade from surrounding tribes and were main players in the horse trade. The interaction of the Crow and whites was very gradual at first; with years often passing before the next recorded visitor. The first documented account of the Crow meeting a non-Indian occurred in 1743. The La Verendrye brothers were exploring the north seeking possible sites for French forts.<sup>66</sup> However, it is highly likely the Crow had encountered whites before this time and after that which were never recorded. The next recorded encounter occurred more than fifty years later as Francois Antoine Larocque sought to open trade with the Crows in 1805.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Robert H. Hines and John M. Faragher, *The American West: A new interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 133-134.

<sup>66</sup> Hubert G. Smith, *The Explorations of the La Verendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738 – 43*, W. Raymond Wood, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*

So much time elapsed between interactions with whites that some Crows who lived into the twentieth century remember seeing the strange visitors for the first time. Pretty Shield, a well respected medicine woman of the Crow was about six years old when she first set eyes on white men. She described them as unusual because their faces were covered by hair. Pretty Shield explained how Crows had originally called them sits-on-the-water because they first saw them in canoes, which made them appear to be sitting on water.<sup>68</sup> Eventually, the whites were called yellow eyes as many of the early trappers suffered from scurvy.

The Crow however, were well aware of the fact white men were coming and would soon overwhelm the Indians. Plenty Coups had received a vision while fasting as a young man in which he foresaw the disappearance of the buffalo. He prophesized of how the four winds were like the white men and that they would continue to come and eventually the Crows would begin living like them.<sup>69</sup> As a result the Crows allied themselves with whites as surrounding tribes began to tighten their grip around Crow country, going as far as serving as auxiliaries for the United States Army during the Indian Wars.<sup>70</sup>

As the Crow became increasingly active with the whites, they began to see the world around them changing at an alarming rate. They transitioned into a society able to move about freely on the plains to one confined to reservations once Anglo America was able to subdue tribes in the West. “There is no Crow, not even the best and most progressive, who does not prefer his wild life to that of the white people, but there is a

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<sup>68</sup> Frank B. Linderman, *Pretty Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932), 46-47.

<sup>69</sup> Linderman, *Plenty Coups*, p., 71-73.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas W. Dunlay, *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the United States Army, 1860 – 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska press, 1982), 44.

considerable number who are sensible enough to see that the old times are past and can never return. We can reason with such men.”<sup>71</sup> In 1883, in his report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Agent Henry Armstrong believed there was a profound difference between those who wanted change and some who held onto to the past. He felt those who wanted to bring the change from the buffalo culture to that of Euro-American lifestyles were best to represent the tribe. However, Armstrong was quite wrong in assuming that a difference existed between those who wanted change and those who did not. In fact, when further examining the Crow history, we can assume that all Crows mildly accepted some change, but not significant changes, until forced to do so.

Many of the early trappers who ventured into Crow country observed how cunning these Indians were. Edwin Thompson Denig, a representative of the American Fur Company made such an observation in 1855, stating, “The Crows are cunning, active, and very intelligent in everything appertaining to the chase, war, or their own individual bargaining.”<sup>72</sup> He was under the impression that the Crow feared the white man or in some cases felt beneath them. However, this was not the case as was demonstrated repeatedly by the Crows as they interacted and gently prodded white traders and trappers when dealing with them.

One of the first white trappers, and early explorers into Crow country, was Francois Antoine Larocque, a French trapper seeking open trade with the Crows. It is highly likely that he sought the so-called Rocky Mountain Indians so that he could open trade with them, as they were considered to be the best nation when it came to tanning and dressing hides. In 1805, Larocque, made a keen observation about the Crow Nation.

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<sup>71</sup> H. J. Armstrong to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 15, 1883, in Commissioner of Indian Affairs “Annual Report, 48<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> session., 883, House executive Document 1.

<sup>72</sup>Denig, *Five Indian tribes of the Upper Missouri*, 149.



He remarked, “Everybody rides, men, women and children. The females ride astride as men do. A child that is too young to keep in [his] saddle is tied to it...he...gallops or trots the whole day if the occasion requires.” The observation made by Larocque is a clear indication that the Crow had incorporated the horse into their everyday lives. By this time they had thoroughly adopted the animal into the Crow culture, including important aspects of tribal life.

Although the famous Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 – 1806, had no direct contact with the Crow, the expedition was affected by this curious nation. It was believed while the expedition moved near Crow country in present-day Montana the party was relieved of many of their horses. Because the Crow did not come out to meet the expedition, but instead took their horses is a clear indication of how the Crows did not view the United States as a powerful ally, but a weak target.<sup>73</sup> After the purchase of the Louisiana Territory and during the beginning of the fur trade era the Crow Indians were comfortably secure in the Big Horn, Yellowstone and Powder River valleys. They had transformed into a society rigid with discipline and had fully incorporated Euro-American technology into their social, religious and military beliefs.

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<sup>73</sup> For an in-depth account of the taking of the horses by the Crow from the Lewis and Clark expedition see Adrian C. Heidenreich, *Smoke Signals in Crow (Apsaalooke) Country: Beyond the Capture of Horses From the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Billings, MT: Artcraft Printers, 2006), 25-32.

## Chapter II

### Early Crow/White relations

“There is no Crow, not even the best and most progressive, who does not prefer his wild life to that of the White people, but there is a considerable number who are sensible enough to see that the old times are past and can never return. We can reason with such men.”<sup>74</sup>

In 1883, Indian agent J. H. Armstrong, in his annual report to the Commissioner of Indian affairs felt confident that a definitive line existed between members of the Crow Tribe who accepted assimilation, and those that resisted it. The concept of the Indian agent was due to the belief Indians were a primitive race of man that needed to be nurtured along in order to succeed in the new world. This belief was widespread throughout Euro-America, due in large part to the writings of early explorers, trappers and traders that gave conflicting descriptions of the Indians, often describing them as having animalistic tendencies.

Early textbooks used throughout the late nineteenth and all of the twentieth century classified Indians as part of the habitat rather than the human race.<sup>75</sup> As a result, most Europeans and Americans heading west in the nineteenth century had the notion they were entering savage lands. American explorer Benjamin Bonneville, moving through Crow country in the 1830’s remarked, “There was no sign of human habitation; for the Crows, as we have already shown, are a wandering people, a race of hunters and

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<sup>74</sup> H. J. Armstrong to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 15, 1883, in COIA “Annual Report, 48<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1883, H. Ex. Doc. 1 pt. 5 Serial 2191, 157.

<sup>75</sup> R. David Edmunds, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie *Indians in American History* (Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2007), 159.

warriors, who live in tents and on horseback, and are continually on the move.”<sup>76</sup> This point of view clearly demonstrated that Captain Bonneville felt Crows were a primitive people. In describing the land, what standards did he use in defining human habitation? Most likely they were based on Euro-American systems, such as ownership of land, housing, towns and so forth.

Noted historian George B. Grinnell also writes, “in their progress through the new western country, the early travelers found here and there camps of Indians, and heard of other camps which they did not see. Accustomed to the sedentary habits of white people, the explorers seem to have taken it for granted that any place or point occupied by a tribe of Indians was the home of that tribe and that it remained permanently in that tract of country – had always been there, and always would be there. Writers who followed the early travelers shared that belief and copied their statements.”<sup>77</sup> These tendencies usually led newcomers to speculate that because Indians were not in that part of the country at any particular time, the land was uninhabited and as a result was not owned by the tribes.

However, the world Bonneville and other travelers and eventually settlers entered was quite advanced, in terms of how much of the people residing in those areas, especially of how they had incorporated various aspects of Euro-American culture into their own. The Indians had long obtained the horse, gun and the ideologies of European trade into their own world, utilizing them extensively.

In fact, the Crow did not entirely abandon their old way of life, but instead fused together the two worlds to create a new and unique culture. They were very selective in

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<sup>76</sup> Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, Robert A. Reese and Alan Sandy, eds., (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 305. Originally published in 1837.

<sup>77</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians, their history and ways of life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924), 13.

including certain aspects of Euro-American Culture to fit within their beliefs. Unfortunately, this aspect of Crow history is often ignored, or misinterpreted by non-Indian scholars. This work will hopefully aid students and scholars of Crow and even Indian history understand the complex culture created by the fusing of the two worlds.

## **Early Crow/White interactions**

Many early accounts of Indian and white contact were often misleading as Indians were viewed as savage people. “Americans opinions about Indians not only reflect their beliefs regarding minority groups but also illustrates their appraisal of themselves,” observed R. David Edmunds.<sup>78</sup> This attitude was apparent well into the twentieth century, and traces of this racism can still be seen today in towns boarding reservations. However, an argument can be made that the early interaction between the Indians and non-Indians was often peaceful and shaped a region’s social and economic institutions.<sup>79</sup> Nations, such as the Crow were instrumental in shaping the American West. The Crow were major players in the horse trade, and were formidable enemies to the surrounding tribes. These early accounts of the Crow were crucial in setting the tone for early interactions between Crows and Euro-Americans. These accounts were also critical in shaping Crow history as the Crow struggled to maintain their identity and culture from the time of first contact, through today.

The first contact the Crows had with non-Indians is believed to be with the La Verendryes in 1742 - 1743. The French wanted to expand their control over the western part of Canada and appointed Pierre Gaultier la Verendryes as commandant of the Posts of the North in 1727. Once in control, La Verendryes established a series of posts in

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<sup>78</sup> Edmunds, *Indians in American History*, 159 – 160.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Western New France. The jumping off point for the French to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages was the post Fort La Reine. It was located on the north bank of the Assiniboine River, near what is now the town of Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.<sup>80</sup> La Verendryes made a trip to the Mandan and Hidatsa accompanied by a group of Assiniboine Indians, but the elder La Verendryes had never made contact with the Crows. His sons on a trading expedition in 1742 were believed to be the first Non-Indians to have made contact with the Crows.<sup>81</sup> Crow Tribal elder and Historian, Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow also believed the French La Verendryes Brothers to be the first whites to have made contact with the Crow.<sup>82</sup> He writes, “Before the Lewis and Clark expedition through Crow country in 1805-6, very few white men had ever seen the Absarokee or Crow Indians. In 1743 the La Verendryes brothers had ventured from their Canadian Frontier outpost and visited the Crow country, naming the inhabitants the ‘Handsome Men’ (*Beaux Hommes*).”<sup>83</sup>

However, earlier mentions of Crows making contact with whites was recorded in 1716. The Hudson Bay Company had established posts along the coast of Hudson Bay. Indians made trips to trade with the whites at the posts and many of these interactions were recorded. In 1715, a group of Indians, believed to be Mandan and Hidatsa arrived at the posts to trade. The following year this same tribe returned once again to trade, but this time accompanied by a group of Crows.<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, the reason they were believed to be Mandan and Hidatsa was the fact that they grew corn. This alone does not give concrete evidence to the reasoning behind why the Hudson Bay employees believed

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<sup>80</sup> Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade*, 22. See also Pierre G. V. la Verendrye, *Journals and letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye and His Sons*, ed. J. L. Burpee (Toronto, 1927) 338-338.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of Crow Country*, 2-3.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade*, 18-19.

them to be of the Mandan and Hidatsa. As a result, Dr. Medicine Crow as well as other historians do not believe the Crows made contact with whites until 1743. Furthermore, the description given of these visitors contradicts many of the accounts given about Crows by whites who traded and lived with this tribe. It was noted that these visitors “bordered on the worst sort of Indians in the country.”<sup>85</sup> As a result, it is safe to assume that the Crows made contact with whites in 1743, but the next visitor that left a record is Francois Antoine Larocque in 1803, and the beginnings of the fur trade era for the Crow people.

The Fur Trade for the Crows was important for two reasons, with the most obvious being how the fur trade brought Euro-American goods such as the Horse, Gun, cloth, beads and metal to the Crows. These foreign introductions were obtained by all tribes in the United States through an extensive trade network. “Aboriginal North America was blanketed by a network of trails and trading relationships linking , to a greater or lesser degree, every tribe to one or more of its neighbors.”<sup>86</sup> Because of this trade network it is safe to assume that each tribe, regardless of location had opportunities to obtain Euro-American goods. In regards to the Indian trade network anthropologist John C. Ewers writes, “at the time of Lewis and Clark the Indian tribes of the Upper Missouri were engaged in a complex system of trade extending for thousands of miles from the Spanish Southwest through nomadic intermediaries to the English trading posts in the western tributaries of the Red and Upper Mississippi rivers.”<sup>87</sup> The major

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty, *Anthropology on the Great Plains: Plains Trade in the prehistoric and Protohistoric Intertribal Relations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 99. See also Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Culture*, 12-13.

<sup>87</sup> John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 18.

difference is how tribes utilized the goods, and to what degree they incorporated them into their societies.

Secondly, the fur trade brought a period of intense interaction between the Crows and Euro-Americans. These interactions shaped and molded every aspect of Crow life, from daily routines such as raising children, band movements and religious beliefs . However, the important thing to note is that the Crows did not fully accept Euro-American culture. Even today Crows have not come to fully accept Euro-American culture. Anthropologist Fred Voget, who has studied and researched many aspects of Crow history and culture, explains: “In the course of prolonged contact and directed change, new social categories possessing a rather distinctive sub-culture appear to have been generated.”<sup>88</sup> He identifies four major sub-cultures that appear on the Crow reservation today. The first is what Voget calls the “native” population of the Crows. This group, usually the smallest in number of all the sub-cultures and consists mainly of great-grandparents and grandparents. The people in this group are usually the elders who have had the fortune to either live during the time when Crows were just beginning to transition into the reservation era, or the early part of the reservation period. The most distinguishing feature about this group is that they do not accept or dismiss Christian beliefs, but define it in their own terms. “Where participation does take place, the meaning of the worship for the individual is in terms of aboriginal values,” explains Voget.<sup>89</sup>

The second layer of these sub-cultures consists mainly of the majority of the population. They are classified as “native-modified,” meaning they did not participate in

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<sup>88</sup> Fred Voget, *Crow Socio-Cultural Groups*, in Sol Tax, *Acculturation in the Americas; proceedings and selected papers* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1967), 88.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

the functioning aboriginal culture. This group did not grow up in an environment that had little interference from the dominant white society. Instead they were raised by “native” parents and experienced “intensive formal socialization within the institutional framework of the dominant society, viz., education and religion.”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, this group continues to adhere to traditional policies and beliefs such as intermarriage within clans, and the practicing of the sweat lodge and giveaways and most of them continue to speak the Crow Language.

The third group, “American-modified,” are fewer in numbers and have placed the Crow systems and beliefs lower than Euro-American systems and beliefs. They believe that education is important, and the exploitation of the land is important for prospering in society. However, they continue to participate to a limited degree in Crow social functions, such as Crow fair, or clan feeds or giveaways if their job allows it. Also, because they are more fluent in English, they tend to serve as intermediaries, or what Dr. Margaret Connell-Szasz has termed, “Cultural Brokers.” She explains, “Intermediaries became repositories of two or more cultures; they changed roles at will, in accordance with circumstances. Of necessity, their lives reflected a complexity unknown to those living within the confines of a single culture. They know how the ‘other side’ thought and behaved, and they responded accordingly. Their grasp of different perspectives led all sides to value them, although not all may have trusted them.”<sup>91</sup> This group can consist of members of the tribe that have a parent that is non-Indian, but also someone with both parents being Crow. In any case, the idea that this group is made up of mostly mixed blood is not definite.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Margaret Connell-Szasz, ed. *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma press, 1994), 6.



The final group consists mainly of people of mixed descent and is called the “American-marginal.” The “American-marginal” group has abandoned Crow culture in its entirety. They tend to try to fit in with the white society, but because they are of mixed blood, they do not succeed in accomplishing this goal. However, in recent years this group has reasserted their “Indianess” but for the wrong reasons. Because they are enrolled members, they are eligible for services through the Indian Health Service for eye, dental and other medical care. Also, like other enrolled members of the Crow they receive per capita payments. These are quarterly payments to individuals of the tribe from money made by the tribally owned coal mines on the reservation. They have never rejected their identity when it came time for these payments, or when they were getting medical care through the I.H.S. Other than these instances, they have discontinued their Crow cultural practices.<sup>92</sup>

It was during the intense period of contact with non-Indians the Crows began to create these different layers of social sub-groups. More importantly was how the different sub-groups helped to maintain the culture. In looking at the four groups the older generations were usually the ones to hold onto the former belief systems, and practiced them. Each successive group then began to filter these concepts adding or subtracting different aspects, such as language, religion and kinship as the Crows progressed through time. For example, famed chief Plenty Coups operated a small store selling goods such as metal tools, fruit and other supplies used in living much like the white man. However, once several Crow families began to abandon older traditional beliefs such as the utilization of medicine bundles, they simply gave them to Plenty

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<sup>92</sup> For a full discussion on the four group see Voget, *Crow Socio-Cultural Groups*, 88-93.

Coups.<sup>93</sup> The obvious question is, “why didn’t they simply discard these items?” Firstly, many of the bundles had been within a family for several generations, so they held some sentimental value. Secondly, and more importantly, the families that gave them up still believed in the supernatural powers of the bundle to an extent. Instead of tossing them aside like garbage, these families ensured the bundle would be taken care of, or risk suffering bad luck because of the improper care of the bundle.<sup>94</sup>

In order to feel like they had not abused the bundle, many Crows who abandoned their beliefs in favor of Christianity took the bundles to Plenty Coups. Although Plenty Coups himself had basically incorporated the ways of the white man into his own life, he accepted the bundles and placed them in an upstairs room of his two story home. They remained there until the house was sold to a non-Indian, and the bundles were transferred around until a suitable home was found for the bundles.<sup>95</sup> This type of action on the part of both the Chief and members of the Crow community is an example of the different groups discussed by Frey, and these groups are significant because they continue to exist. However, the sub-grouping also creates the notion that some members of the various groups are less Crow than others.

The generally accepted concept behind the definition of a Crow is language and whether a person speaks it or not. More important is if a person understands and practices the social-familial system utilized by the Crow. This system was in place before contact was made with Euro-Americans, and is still critical in Crow society today.

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<sup>93</sup> Philip Beaumont, interview 2002.

<sup>94</sup> William Wildschut, ed. By John C. Ewers *Crow Indian Medicine Bundles* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1975), 12-13.

<sup>95</sup> This information can be found in the NAGPRA project handbook on the care and treatment of Crow spiritual Items located at Plenty Coups State Park, Pryor, MT. (2005)

However, the majority of what is written about the Crows during this early interaction with Euro-Americans centers on warfare and trade, not language and kinship.

Little is known about the Crow during the nineteenth century except their desire for war and their role as middlemen in the horse trade. Early trappers often remarked at how war was one of the most important aspects of Crow life, but failed to mention the significance of family. In the 1850's, Swiss artist Rudolf Kurz traveling among the Crows wrote, "Without war an Indian is no longer an Indian. War is his means of educating himself. Success in war is his supreme aim in life."<sup>96</sup> Although he did portray the Indian as warlike, he failed to mention an important aspect of tribal life. He wrote, "In renouncing war he gives up his chief life purposes; he is forced to rearrange the plan of his whole existence."<sup>97</sup> What Kurz failed to mention was that war honors were an integral part of the Crow social system and if success was achieved by an individual, the family also enjoyed the honors. This included blood relatives, clan members, society members and so forth. Because of this family system, the Crows were able to retain much of their culture helping them to resist assimilation policies.

Once intertribal warfare ceased, the process of gaining and celebrating war honors was simply transferred to the new political arena created as a result of the reservation system. For example, once a person was elected chairman, the person elected placed members of his or her family in key positions within the tribe. The newly appointed individuals shared in the glory of the newly elected chairman, much like they did during

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<sup>96</sup> Rudolph F. Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friedrich Kurz: An account of his Experiences among Fur Traders and American Indians on the Mississippi and the Upper Missouri Rivers*, J. N. B. Hewitt, ed., Myrtis Jarrell, trans., Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin No. 115 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), 295.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*

the era before the reservation period.<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, scholars writing Crow history ignore their social aspect of Crow culture. They fail to mention that the Crows kept the family and kinship system that was in place since the separation from the parent tribe, and even through the assimilation policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's. By combining primary documents with oral history, a thorough look into Crow Culture can be made. This study will help readers understand the complex nature of the social system practiced by the Crow, as well as their contributions to the shaping of the American West. More importantly, this study might help us understand why the Crows maintained their Culture longer than most tribes living on nearby reservations. This can be accomplished by examining the major periods of intense interaction such as the pre-history of the Crows, the history beginning with the Fur Trade era, and through the nineteenth century, when Indians underwent major changes politically and socially. The reaction to these changes by the Crows can help us better understand why their history was quite different from that of the Northern Cheyenne or the Sioux.

## **Helping Shape the American West**

In 1805, Francois-Antoine Larocque arrived in the Mandan and Hidatsa villages hoping to gain valuable business from the Indians. Working for the British Northwest Company at the time, Larocque understood the potential of the Mandan and Hidatsa trade partnership. Even more important was the fact that this alliance with the Hidatsa would allow Larocque to open trade with their partners, the Rocky Mountain Indians (Crow). Situated on the banks of the Knife River near the Missouri River, the horticultural people of the Mandan and Hidatsa villages were a popular trade port for the mounted Indians of

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<sup>98</sup> The process of war honors and how a family participated in the honors will be explained later in the chapter.

the northern plains.<sup>99</sup> If Larocque could corner this market, he could eliminate the competition for Crow trade, especially because they were known for their expertise in tanning hides. The Mandan and Hidatsa were aware of the importance of the trade with their Crow relatives and tried to discourage the Frenchman from trading with anyone but the Mandan and Hidatsa. Larocque explained, “The Indians here are exceedingly troublesome (sic) to sell their horses to us, the prise (sic) that we usually pay them for a horse can purchas (sic) two from the Rocky Mountain [Crow] Indians who are expected dayly (sic) & they would wish us to have no more goods when those Indians arrive, so as to have the whole trade themselves.”<sup>100</sup>

Eventually, one of the chiefs requested a meeting with Larocque at which point the chief asked what his intentions were for a pipe stem he possessed. After informing the chief it was for the Rocky Mountain Indians (Crow), the chief proceeded to dissuade him from having any contact with the Crows. He first informed Larocque of how the Arickara and Cheyenne were constantly on the warpath and could kill him if he tried to leave the safety of the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. Once that attempt failed, he proceeded to inform Larocque of the terrible nature of the Crows. “He gave the worst character possible to the Rocky Mountain Indians, saying they were thieves and liars,” he wrote.<sup>101</sup> The chief told of how a Canadian by the name Menard had recently visited the Crows, wanting to open trade with them. The Chief had warned Menard about the Crows, but Menard went traded with them. Once they concluded their business, Menard left the Crow camp but was followed. Several young warriors overtook Menard and proceeded to relieve him of his newly acquired merchandise, including his horses. Near

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<sup>99</sup> Hoxie, *Parading Through History*, p. 31-32

<sup>100</sup> Larocque, *Yellowstone Journal*, 165.

<sup>101</sup> Larocque, 165-166.

death, Menard returned to the village and told the Mandan and Hidatsa what had happened. The Mandan and Hidatsa then retaliated against the Crow for their actions against Menard, killing two. Unimpressed by the story, and not sure of its validity, Larocque informed the chief of his intention to “go or to die trying.”<sup>102</sup>

Soon after the meeting between Larocque and the chief, the much anticipated Crow camp arrived at the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. They paraded through the villages of the Mandan and Hidatsa announcing their arrival by displaying their fine adornments. The egregious style of the Crows was nothing new as they had always presented themselves well. Traders who witnessed the Crows on the move were greatly impressed. Edwin Denig wrote, “When the camp is on the move in the summer, this tribe presents a grand and lively appearance more so perhaps than any other. On these occasions both men and women dress in their best clothes.”<sup>103</sup> Larpenteuer was equally impressed stating, “As they did not drink, their trade was all in substantial goods, which kept them always well dressed, and extremely rich in horses; so it was really a beautiful sight to see that tribe on the move.”<sup>104</sup> The same Chief who had given Larocque the negative account of the Crows, quickly discontinued what he was doing and followed the Crows procession back to their camp. Many others in the village also followed racing to the Crow camp. Larocque stated, “There did not remain 20 persons in the village, men women and children all went to the newly arrived camp, carrying a quantity of Corn raw and cooked which they traded for Leggings, Robes & dried meat.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Denig, *Of the Crow Nation*, p. 158.

<sup>104</sup> Charles Larpenteuer, *Forty Years a fur trader on the Upper Missouri*, ed. Elliot Coues (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1898), 37

<sup>105</sup> Larocque, *Yellowstone Journal*, 170.

The method of trying to dissuade, or prevent white traders from doing business with neighboring tribes was not uncommon on the plains. The Yankton and Teton Sioux had prevented a Frenchman from conducting trade with the Arickara who were enemies of the Sioux. They first welcomed him into their camp and proceeded to give a negative accounting of both the Arickara and their Teton relatives on the Upper Missouri. The trader was forced into trading his goods for undesirable skins, and eventually forced to give much of his belongings to the Yankton, and soon the Teton arrived to take whatever was left. This was a clear indication that the trade with the Euro-Americans was controlled to a certain degree by the Indians.<sup>106</sup>

The action of the chief and the other Mandan and Hidatsa people clearly indicated how they regarded the Crow as an invaluable trade partner. In an attempt to keep the trade for their own benefit; they misinformed Larocque about the Crow. More importantly, the way Crows interacted with the surrounding tribes and the Europeans demonstrated that the Crows had a great ability to move between different cultures and adapt with ease. They borrowed certain cultural traits that fit into their culture and dismissed other aspects that did not fit. Although the Crows were egocentric, they understood how important certain trade partners were, as did many other tribes. “A redskin thinks twice before he murders his trader; he is aware of his dependence on the fur traders and of reciprocal interests that unite them,” observed Rudolf Kurz who traded with the Indians.<sup>107</sup> While at the villages of the Mandan and Hidatsa Larocque made the discovery of an American party making its way up the Missouri river toward the Pacific Ocean in hopes of finding a waterway to the west. Larocque contacted the expedition

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<sup>106</sup> A.P. Nasitir, *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents illustrating the History of the Missouri 1785 – 1804*, Vol. 1. (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952), 269 -280.

<sup>107</sup> Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, 216.

and offered his service in exchange for an opportunity to travel with the group. However, he was declined an invitation and ended up accompanying the Crows back to the Rocky Mountain region while Lewis and Clark made their historic voyage westward. Larocque eventually accompanied the Crows on a historic return trip back toward the Big Horns. He was likely the first white man to make such a journey into Crow country. More importantly, The Crows understood that he was a valuable asset as he could supply them with European goods, essential for survival among the other plains tribes.

However, Larocque did not gain as much popularity as the famed Lewis and Clark expedition. Ultimately, the Lewis and Clark expedition introduced the American West to the world and the duo became the most illustrious exploring party in American history.<sup>108</sup> Unbeknownst to the Crow Indians, and the Indians in the West, the expedition marked the beginnings of a change in the way they viewed the land around them. More importantly, the interaction with the newly arrived foreigners helped create a new and unique Crow nation, that exists even today.

## **America arrives in Crow Country**

On March 4, 1801, Thomas Jefferson became the President of the United States of America. Jefferson had always envisioned the United States being occupied by small yeoman farmers. He was fearful of “overcrowded cities, divided into a capitalistic aristocracy on the one hand and deprived proletariat on the other.”<sup>109</sup> He was a well educated person, speaking and reading seven languages and having a great interest and

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<sup>108</sup> Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A new Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 137.

<sup>109</sup> George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 336.



knowledge in geography, paleontology, zoology, botany and archaeology.<sup>110</sup> He had an intense interest in expanding the borders of the United States, especially to the west. This interest eventually translated into the purchasing of the Louisiana Territory, and the exploration of the new land. Other early American leaders like Jefferson and James Madison placed expansion at the heart of the American political system.<sup>111</sup> For the country to grow and become a world power, men like Jefferson and Madison wanted to expand the borders and utilize all the natural resources west of the Appalachian Mountains. Historically, for the United States, valuable additions of land included the trans-Appalachians in the peace settlement at the close of the Revolution, the annexation of Texas and the conquest of Northern Mexico which ultimately expanded American borders at an incredible rate.<sup>112</sup> The purchase of the Louisiana Territory was the most significant of all the additions to the young country, and ultimately was the most critical in regards to the Crow people and how they transitioned into the modern era of Crow Indians.

In April of 1803, the U. S. obtained the territory west of the Mississippi from the French Ruler Napoleon Bonaparte. President Thomas Jefferson had sent a delegation to make an offer to buy the Louisiana port of New Orleans because of the fear that the French Government would close the port to America, and more importantly, France would be a formidable enemy in North America. A few years earlier, the French under Napoleon had defeated Spain and forced them to cede Louisiana back to French control. Jefferson believed that if Napoleon gained possession of the territory he would surely attempt to invade the U.S. However, with Napoleon dealing with an uprising in Haiti, his

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>111</sup> Hine, Faragher, *American West*, 133.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*

plans to expand in North America were halted. He had to choose between expanding closer to home, or abroad and eventually decided to cut his losses in the New World. For a very minimal price, the American delegation purchased the Louisiana territory and doubled the size of the United States.<sup>113</sup>

Indians living in this territory had unknowingly undergone a transfer of ownership overnight, so to speak. Formerly under Spanish and French rule, the Crows and surrounding tribes found themselves' under American rule, not yet comprehending what lay ahead for them with America expansion. Also, many tribes like the Crow had a worldview in which the boundaries ended at the furthest distance they could travel. Of course they were aware of the different tribes, but many were unaware of the sheer numbers of whites living in the east.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, Americans going west had a distorted view of the inhabitants of the west, viewing them as children rather than intelligent adults, and as a result many of the dealings between Indians and the American Government often carried the undertone of this belief. They were greatly misinformed of how primitive Indians in the west were, but instead were surprised to encounter nations politically and socially advanced. Examining Crow social and family structure along with certain instances of Crow history will help us better understand how the two very different worlds were combined into one, to create a unique society.

## **Fusion of Two Cultures**

The Crow people had undergone a drastic change in lifestyle with the acquisition of the horse and gun. This altered the way the Crows conducted their everyday lives,

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 133-134. See also, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* ed., Bernard Devoto (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1953). In the introduction, Devoto goes into great detail of the background of the Louisiana Purchase.

<sup>114</sup> Kurz, *Journal of Frederick Kurz*, 144.

such as the way they hunted buffalo, the battles with other tribes, and it also affected the way children were raised. The incorporation of this new technology began with the acquisition of the horse, the introduction of a foreign system of business, and the change in the political process traditionally practiced by the Crow. The Horse and Gun period thus is described as the time from the acquisition of the horse and gun to the time when the buffalo neared extinction.<sup>115</sup> They found neighboring tribes armed with Euro-American weapons forcing their way into territories claimed by the Crow. As a result, Crow leadership had to adjust the way the tribe was training their young boys. Meanwhile, the demand for furs in Europe increased, and the potential for a fur market was soon realized. Upon his return from the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Meriwether Lewis described the upper Missouri River region as “richer in Beaver and otter than any country on earth.”<sup>116</sup> His description seemed to imply that the fur trade industry might be quite lucrative for the United States. Others working for different companies such as the British-owned Hudson Bay Company were already aware of the potential of the region described by Lewis. The H.B.C., as they were known, had already sent men and supplies to this region and created an operation with the Indians. In their business, the Indian men trapped the beaver, the Indian women tanned the hides and the traders exchanged European goods to the Indians for the furs and then transported the furs back to Europe.<sup>117</sup> This system supplied the various nations living on the plains with weapons, and the Crows, who were rich in horses, soon realized the importance of keeping the

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<sup>115</sup> For an in-depth account of the infusion of the horse and gun into Plains Culture see chapter five of Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains* (New York: J.J. Augustine Publisher, 1966) This chapter specifically talks about the incorporation of the gun and horse.

<sup>116</sup> Bernard Augustine Devoto, *The Course of Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), 527.

<sup>117</sup> Hine and Faragher, *American West*, 143.

trade network open with these traders. Eventually, American companies emerged to open their own companies and rivaled those of the British.

From this era of intense interaction and trade came some of the great explorers, warriors, chiefs and traders who had a hand in creating the American West as it is known today. The influence Indians had over whites, and whites over Indians during this early interaction was critical in forming opinions about each other. For this reason, we must look at the backgrounds of some of the important figures in the early interaction of Crows and Euro-Americans, as they are important in the creation of today's Crow nation. More importantly, the interaction between these people likely resulted in positive feedback to the white world from the trappers and traders, and to the Crow from the warriors and chiefs of the Crow.

The notable characters included men such as Manuel Lisa, known for creating the Missouri Fur Company. He was one of the first to exploit the beaver-rich region described by Meriwether Lewis. John Colter, a former guide for the Lewis and Clark Expedition also became a popular figure in the history of the American West as he was believed to be the first American to explore the Yellowstone and Big Horn Basin region. Others such as Hugh Glass, Jedediah Smith, William Ashley and Jim Bridger to name a few, also became popular figures of the West.

From the Crow Nation emerged several great leaders who, with their wisdom and farsightedness, guided the Crow people through this very confusing time. Such leaders included Plays With His Face, who was known as a daring individual. He had received a vision during an encounter with a bear when he had seen the four seasons of the year. The bear told Plays With His Face that he would continue to see the seasons for a long

time. As a result he believed that he would live a long life and could not be killed. He soon became a reckless warrior and leader often going into battle without hesitation. Sore Belly, A.K.A. Rotten Belly, was a visionary who was successful in maintaining Crow territories with his leadership. On several expeditions, he was successful in defeating large numbers of Sioux and Cheyenne camps, forcing them away from Crow country. He is also the one credited with giving the speech of the Crows being in the right place. Other leaders include Long Hair, Twines his Tail, Long Horse and Red Bear. These chiefs are well known in Crow oral history, and were instrumental in retaining the culture of the Crows throughout the early nineteenth Century.<sup>118</sup>

During this time period, miraculously, the Crow held steadfast to their social beliefs while adjusting their political and military beliefs in order to survive in the changing West. More importantly, the Crows were able to make certain adjustments politically during the shift in power that occurred with the Louisiana Purchase.

The warfare with the surrounding tribes often dominated their lives. Retaliatory raids were common and it appeared that war was all they knew, especially with the Blackfeet tribe. The Blackfeet were notoriously known as deadly enemies to both Indians and Whites. In 1854, an agent for the government visited Fort Sarpy, located in Crow Country. He reported, “Scarcely a day passes but the Crow Country is infested with more or less parties of Blackfeet, who murder indiscriminately any one that comes within their reach. At Fort Sarpy so great is the danger that no one ventures even a few yards from his own door without company and being well armed.”<sup>119</sup> In 1834, Zenas Leonard traveled through the Yellowstone Valley reporting the Crow and Blackfeet were

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<sup>118</sup> Tim Bernardis, *Crow Social Studies: A Teacher's Guide* (Crow Agency MT.: Bilingual Materials Development Center, 1986), 43-64.

<sup>119</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Hereafter cited as *ARCIA*), 1854, 85.

fierce enemies and “War was their only desire.”<sup>120</sup> Up until 1887, the Crow could still be found raiding for horses from the Blackfeet.<sup>121</sup>

Some early trappers and traders however, were impressed with the Plains tribes, especially their social and political systems. They interacted openly with the tribes, witnessing first-hand their unique culture. The Indians, although not a literate people, adhered to strict policies that were enforced by War Societies. When individuals broke laws, they suffered rapid and severe punishment by the societies. Plenty Coups stated, “The policing of the villages was left to these societies, especially to the War-clubs and the Foxes, and this duty required much vigilance.”<sup>122</sup> The influence and power the Chief and the policing societies had over the tribe was quite evident. On his first encounter with the Crows, Charles Larpenteur, observed as to how friendly the Crows were toward the whites. However, he witnessed firsthand the shrewd nature of the Crows in dealing with the whites as they forced Larpenteur and his party to conduct trade, or suffer the consequences. They quickly bartered goods until the Crow were satisfied, but also noticed that the Chief and his police kept many of the young warriors in line who wanted to take the goods without trade.<sup>123</sup>

However, many of the early writings regarding the Crow often ignore these practices, choosing to focus on warfare and trade. This attitude resulted in the prejudices toward Indians, often ending in some type of conflict between Indians and Non-Indians. Also, the social and familial aspect of the Indians in the American West was often ignored or misinterpreted by the newcomers.

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<sup>120</sup> Leonard, *The Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, 237.

<sup>121</sup> ARCIA, 1887, 216. *Daily Gazette*, September 30<sup>th</sup> – October 5<sup>th</sup> 1887.

<sup>122</sup> Linderman, *Plenty Coups*, 53-54.

<sup>123</sup> Edwin Bearss, *Bighorn Canyon National Recreation area*, Montana-Wyoming, History Basic Data, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Office of History and Historic Architecture, Eastern Service Center, 1970), 82.

## Chapter III - Crow Political System

### “Bacheechchee”

In modern times, Crow tribal politics has become increasingly important to the Crow people because of the fact that whoever is in office control the money and the jobs. However, this was not the case prior to the mid to late reservation periods. A very distinct political system exists which often confused and frustrated non-Indians. This is evident in the signing of treaties between the Indians and the U.S. government as America struggled to identify leaders among the different tribes, especially the Crow. The early encounters between the Crow and Euro-Americans was often centered on trade or warfare as the Crow traded with Euro-Americans as well as served as auxiliaries for the U.S. Army. As a result, the political system of the Crow was often misinterpreted. In order for the reader to understand the system a look into tribal politics is imperative.

The Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 – 1806 opened the west to the world with the discoveries of new species of plants and animals. It was an exciting time as the expedition was credited with bringing the advancement of civilization into the west. They encountered different landscapes, made startling discoveries of how untouched the West was. Unfortunately, the people inhabiting the west were all but forgotten in the accounts of the expedition and were eventually viewed more as a barrier than anything else. Historian, R. David Edmunds believes that most Americans have readily accepted a conventional view that the westward expansion of the American frontier marked an advance of “Civilization” over “Savagery.”<sup>124</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth, especially when examining the way Crows adapted to the changing world around them.

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<sup>124</sup> Edmunds, *Indians in American History*, 159.

They were able to maintain their language and culture through economic changes as well as social changes, like the creation of the reservations. The buffalo hunting tribes of the Northern Plains lived a life centered on an annual cycle that was very structured. Many early literate trappers and traders made keen observations of how structured the Crows were. They hunted in the summer gathering, processing game for the winter, much like a farmer plants his crops in the spring and summer for winter consumption. They also followed a political structure, which changed as the world around them changed, much like American politics changes as the world changes. More importantly, a few tribes such as the Crow retained much of their culture throughout the assimilation process.

## **Crow Culture**

Culture is a term that is often difficult to define, especially when applied to Indians because in modern times Crows have incorporated many aspects of European civilization. They mainly speak English, drive automobiles and live in dwellings like other Americans. Thus, defining Crow Culture becomes difficult, because to a passerby the Crows live like everyone else. However, Crow culture is unique because it intertwines traditional Crow customs and beliefs with Euro-American beliefs and customs. To differentiate Crow Culture and American Culture, one must first gain an in-depth understanding of Crow systems.

Professional scholars Dr. Timothy McCleary and Dale Old Horn, who have studied Crow history, give a detailed and thorough description of the Holistic definition of culture and how kinship is incorporated into culture from a Crow perspective.

“Culture can be described as being made up of four major aspects or components:



Ideology, Social Structure, Communications, and Technology.”<sup>125</sup> The following is a brief model explaining the major components of Crow Culture as defined by Old Horn and McCleary.

**Ideology:**

- Thought
  - o Values
  - o Ethics
  - o Aesthetics
- Philosophy
  - o Beliefs
  - o Belief Systems
  - o Morality
  - o Religiosity -

**Technology:**

- Food
- Clothing
- Shelter
- Tools of Construction
- Tools of Destruction
- Health maintenance

**Social Structure:**

- Economics

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<sup>125</sup> McCleary, Timothy P. and Old Horn, Dale D. *The Social and Family Structure of the Apsaalooke* (Crow Agency: Little Big Horn College, 1995), 1.

- Education
- Government
- Religion
- Kinship
- Entertainment
- Recreation
- Military
- Fraternal Organizations

**Communications:**

- Oral
- Written
- Physical<sup>126</sup>

Although all the components are equally important in Crow culture, for the purpose of this work I will focus on Ideology and Social Structure, since they become more influential throughout the reservation period. Another reason for focusing on Social Structure and Ideology is that communication and technology is self explanatory. Also, Social Structure and Ideology were far more significant during the early and late reservation periods for the Crows.

Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow gives a description that best defines the political system of the Crows stating:

“The tribal organization of the Crow, as well as that of their neighboring plains tribes, was unique in some respects. There was no actual administrative body and yet the tribe was a going concern without any apparent disharmony; there was no

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<sup>126</sup>*Ibid*, 1-3.

permanent enforcement body because there were no absolute laws to be enforced, but still the tribe was well behaved; individualism was supreme, but still the people lived in pervading philanthropy, such as Western civilizations had never heard of.”<sup>127</sup>

Although appearing unorganized, the Crow maintained much of this system until they were forced on to reservations in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The description given by Medicine Crow is the basis from which Crow Tribal government functioned until the early reservation period.

## **Ideology / Worldview**

Dr. Rodney Frey, author of several works on Crow Indians writes, “World View Refers to the symbolic categories and processes that help a given people interpret the world about them and generate their behavior.”<sup>128</sup> The Crow world view is similar to this concept but deviates from it in several instances. The Crow place the Social and Economic institutions as more important than Technology and Communication. They believe the Social and Economic parts are crucial in molding the Culture of the Crow. Clans under the Social part of Culture are important because they are the basis of the World View, and were handed down to them from Old Man Coyote.<sup>129</sup> The Clan system helped create and shape the society in which the Crow existed, as a result they consider themselves as having a direct relationship between social standing and the creator, which became more evident for the Crows in the nineteenth century. The belief that they were

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<sup>127</sup> Joseph Medicine Crow, “The Effects of European Culture Contacts upon the Economic, Social, and Religious Life of the Crow Indians (M.A. Thesis: University of Southern California, 1939), 29-30.

<sup>128</sup> Rodney Frey, *The World of the Crow Indian: As Driftwood Lodges* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 177.

<sup>129</sup> Old Man Coyote is a Supernatural being responsible for creating the world. For an in-depth look at Old Man Coyote see Robert Lowie, *Myths and Traditions of the Crow Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1918), 14-51.

selected by the creator and placed on this earth for a purpose, and that everything around them had a purpose, allowed the Crows to function within the society around them. They made adjustments to the changing environment by incorporation, the major changes including the horse, the gun and the white man and the drastic changes they brought with them..

By the early nineteenth century, the Crows were securely planted on the northern plains, and were divided into various bands and sub-bands. To a person not associated with the tribe it can be confusing to make sense of the various bands and how they were divided. The main band, the Mountain Crow, was comprised of the descendents of the first group of people who broke off from the parent tribe between three and five hundred years ago.<sup>130</sup> This group was by far the most numerous and known also as the Many Lodges, controlling lands along the high ranges of Northern Wyoming and Southern Montana. Eventually, a small number of this group hived off and created another band, but still considered to be a part of the Mountain Crow, known as the Kicked-in-their-bellies.<sup>131</sup> According to oral history, they received the name because of an incident that occurred with one of their well known warriors. Sometime around 1725 a war party succeeded in taking a stallion from a neighboring tribe on the Green River in what is now Wyoming. They brought the animal back to the camp and caused a lot of excitement as members of the tribe gathered to see the new animal. As they examined the animal, one man got to close and the horse, not liking the man getting to close kicked him in the stomach. He fell into the dirt and Crows being known as pranksters and jokesters quickly

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<sup>130</sup> There is no exact date as to when the separation occurred but different scholars employing various methods put the Mountain Crow on the Northern Plains anywhere from five hundred years ago to three hundred years. See Frey, *The World of the Crow Indians*, p. 9 – 12.

<sup>131</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, p. 4-5.

gave him the name Kicked in the Belly. The man along with the band he was a part of was known as Kicked-In-Their-Bellies because of this incident.<sup>132</sup> The River Crow band was the last group to become buffalo hunters, mainly living along the Missouri, Milk and Yellowstone rivers.<sup>133</sup> They also acquired the name Black Lodges because they used pine cones to heat their lodges and the smoke from the pine-cone fires darkened the tops of the lodges. As a result, other bands who encountered them, always took notice as to how the tops of their lodges were black from the smoke from the pine-cone fires.<sup>134</sup>

When it came to the bands, Crows recognized a band member as being a part of his or her father's band. If a Mountain Crow woman married into the River Crow band, their children automatically were considered to be River Crow. The wife also assumed the title of being a part of the River Crow because her husband and children were a part of this band. However, there were some cases in which a person or entire sub-bands moved freely between the bands. The reason for the free movement was likely because they had relatives in the band and were invited to live with them. In that case a person of importance such as a chief, or wife of a chief may ask his or her family to join them, and they may ask their families to join and so on.<sup>135</sup>

Oral history suggests there was a fourth band that either became lost, or died off during the Crow migration onto the plains. This band, the Beaver-dries-its-fur possibly fell behind of the main body of people that left the parent tribe. The Crow give four possible explanations as to what happened to this band. Firstly, some believe the band had simply split off from the main body somewhere in what is now Canada and remained

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<sup>132</sup> Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of Crow Country*, 100.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> McCleary, Old Horn, *Social-Familial Kinship*, 4.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 4-6.

there, creating their own tribe. It is also possible the band moved east, settling near what is now Lake Michigan. In recent years claims have been made by several Crows who have visited tribes near Lake Michigan and Northern Canada that they had a language similar to the Crow people. The third scenario is that the band joined with the Kiowa who controlled the Black hills and were very friendly with the Crows. That is why some believe there is a close connection with the Kiowa even today. The final scenario is that the band all died off from being poisoned. Apparently, a group of Comanche came upon a site where they found many dead bodies. They informed other tribes that the dead were dressed as the Crow were dressed, and eventually the news got back to the Crows. In any case, the Crows recognize the three bands, Mountain Crow, River Crow and Kicked-In-Their-Bellies.<sup>136</sup> Because the fourth band, Beaver-dries-its-fur may have been killed and no survivors exist, the Crow do not mention their names as it is part of their custom to not speak the names of the deceased.

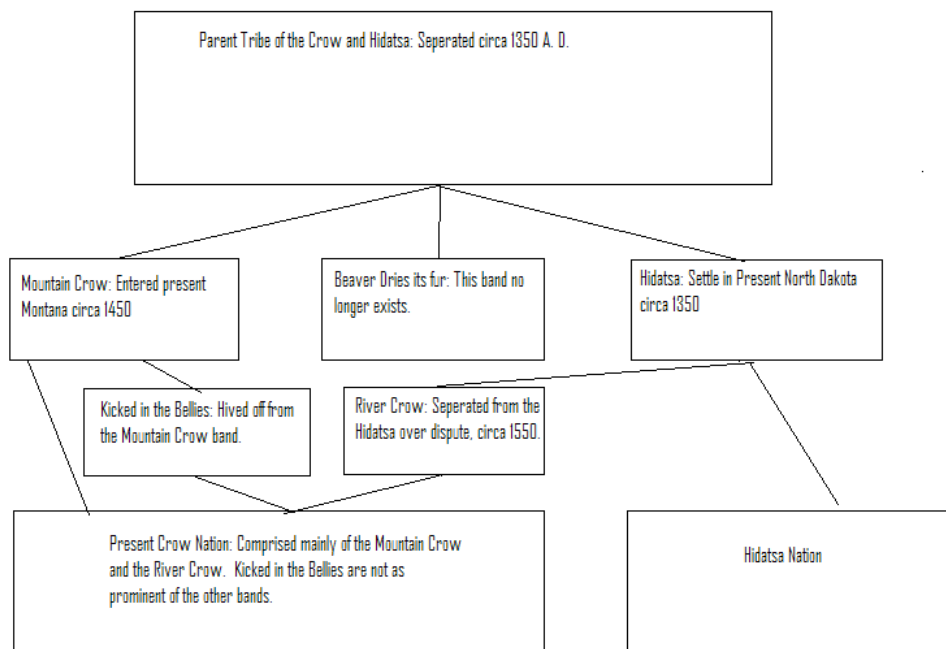
Over the past several decades there has become a renewed interest in finding out what happened to this band. This renewed interest occurred when a member of the tribe had travelled into Canada and encountered a tribe having similarities in the language. A teacher in this tribe was passing out papers to her students and in their language was saying, “here you go, or Hiinee.” The word Hinee in the Crow Language means “here you go” which is what the teacher was saying to her students as she handed them their papers. Because of this a small delegation was sent to the tribe for more research but

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*

they much like others before them came back unsuccessful in finding any answers to the mystery behind this particular band.<sup>137</sup>

## The Crow Bands



## Crow Leadership

As in any society of organized people an individual or individuals must be selected to oversee or run the community. In the case of the Crow people, much like that of most Indian tribes on the Plains, leaders were selected because of their success in warfare. These individuals who accomplished the feats were called, “bacheeitché,” or

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<sup>137</sup> In teaching Crow History at Little Big Horn College in the summer of 2006 I was told of this story by Dr. Timothy McCleary.

“good man.” These men were recognized as leaders by the community, but they functioned only when the occasion called for it.<sup>138</sup> For example, if the camp was to move to find a different location, a chief, or head chief was consulted. He would then decide where to move, based on facts obtained by the scouts. These scouts were members of a warrior society selected by the overall chief to be the nations appointed police guard. These societies were responsible to keep peace in the camps, as well as to protect them from the surrounding tribes. The chief had to be knowledgeable of the land, and of the needs of the camp, so it was imperative to select an individual that met these requirements.

Each band had a head chief whose authority superseded the other chiefs and sub-chiefs of that particular band. When all the bands were camped together, an overall chief had supreme authority over all other chiefs. The sub-chiefs became advisors to the main chief and helped enforce the law. They managed all aspects of the community from protection, law and order, hunts, warfare and even religious ceremonies.<sup>139</sup> The Crow were democratically organized, and members of the tribe could act as they pleased, so long as it did not disrupt the welfare of the community.<sup>140</sup> Visitors to the Crows often remarked of how well they maintained order within their villages.<sup>141</sup> This can be partly attributed to the fact that Crows followed a rigid process in training their males to become, or at least have a chance to lead the nation. This created a system of competition among the males who aspired to become part of the elite members of the society. Zenas Leonard witnessed the competition between the males stating, “There is

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<sup>138</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 5 – 6.

<sup>139</sup> Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of Crow Country*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 6.

<sup>141</sup> Kurz, *Journal of Adolph Kurz*, 184.



more personal ambition and rivalry existing among this tribe than any other I became acquainted with.”<sup>142</sup>

Historically, the Crows did not inherit leadership positions, but in order for an individual to become chief, four major feats had to be completed to assume the position. Also, there was no required order in which the four tasks had to be completed. An individual had to count coup, which meant to touch an enemy with a coup stick. The second was the person had to take a picketed horse from an enemy camp. Thirdly, he or she had to take a weapon away from an enemy in battle. Finally, and often the most important was leading a successful raid, or war party. This included gaining booty, while returning all the members of the party home without any losses.<sup>143</sup> More importantly, it should be understood that in order for a young man to go on the any type of party, hunting or war, he had to earn the right to be a part of that group. An individual could not decide one day to go on an organized hunt, war party or horse stealing expedition, but had to be asked by the organizer. The Crow were strict in the sense that they trained their children from infancy in the art of hunting and warfare. In the Crow culture it was solely up to the paternal side of the family to ensure a male child was getting all the possible training.

Furthermore, the way Crows raised their children, especially the males, was different compared to other tribes. Edwin Denig noted, “The men and women are troublesome enough in many things, but the greatest nuisance in creation is Crow Children, boys ages 9 to 14. They are left to do just as they please. They torment their parents and everyone else, do all kinds of mischief without either correction or

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<sup>142</sup> Leonard, *Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, 232.

<sup>143</sup> Tim Bernardis, *Crow Social Studies: A Teacher's Guide* (Crow Agency: Bilingual Materials Development Center, 1986), 7.

reprimand. In other nations these small fry are kept out of sight where men are, but the parents of this nation place them before themselves in every crowd or assembly, or in their own families. Thus they become intolerable, and a few years after ripen into the bold, forward, impudent young men before mentioned.”<sup>144</sup> It is likely the Crows raised their children in this manner for several reasons.

Firstly, Crows have the general belief children are sacred, and as such no physical punishment should ever be done to them. The Crows believe, “The Acquisition and transmission of sacred power was essential to life, health, wealth, and success, and the child was the central actor in the acquisition and transmission of sacred power,” believed Fred Voget, author of several books on Crow Culture.<sup>145</sup> They were a vital part of the community and because they were highly regarded, parents never punished them or physically hit them.<sup>146</sup> Osborne Russell wrote, “It is a high crime for a father or mother to inflict punishment on their male children.”<sup>147</sup> Secondly, the males in the tribe were expected to assume more of a role in the hunting and protection of the camp. They were raised in different phases of training so that by the time they were there teenagers the young boys had turned into young men. Also, it may be that the Crows understood warfare was inevitable and every warrior was critical in serving as such. In any case, the Crows probably realized that by the time these young boys reached puberty they could easily lose their lives in the hunt or in war. As a result, they were given more freedom and care because as members of the Crow, they were the most likely to be engaged in war

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<sup>144</sup> Denig, *Of The Crow Nation*, 32 -33.

<sup>145</sup> Fred Voget, *A Child-Centered Culture: The Crow Indians of Montana Location, Origins, and the Culture History*, in “*Teaching and Writing local and reservation history: the Crows* (Chicago: Newberry, 1994), 143.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas E. Mails, *Mystic Warriors of the Plains: The Culture, arts crafts and religion of the Plains Indians* (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1995), 914.

<sup>147</sup> Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 147.

at an early age. However, every male child had to go through different stages of training in order to reach the status of a warrior, or leader.<sup>148</sup>

Along with the father, the mother was expected to take part in the raising and training of the male children. The young children spent much time with their mothers throughout the infancy and toddler stages up to about the age of five, but the role of the mother was different from the fathers. They would often encourage their children indirectly, by showing much admiration for the accomplished warriors of the tribe. Noted Crow Chief Plenty Coups tells of one such experience he had with his mother.

“That young man on the white horse is Little-Wolf, son of Medicine-Women, ‘one would say admiringly. ‘He is brave, and so handsome.’ “Yes, and he has already counted coup and may marry when he chooses,’ another would boast. “Think of it!’ another mother would exclaim. ‘He has seen but twenty snows! Ah-mmmmm!’ “Perhaps she would lay her hand over her mouth, which is the sign for astonishment,” explained plenty Coups. He continued: This talking between our mothers, firing us with determination to distinguish ourselves, made us wish we were men. It was always going on –his talking among our elders, both men and women – and we were ever listening. On the march, in the village, everywhere, there was praise in our ears for skill and daring. Our mothers talked before us of the deeds of other women’s sons, and warriors told stories of the bravery and fortitude of other warriors until a listening boy would gladly die to

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<sup>148</sup> It was not a requirement to enter in the trainings, but most males were expected to join in the trainings.

have his name spoken by the chiefs in council, or even by the women in their lodges.”<sup>149</sup>

Conversations such as this were done intentionally to encourage young boys to take the path toward becoming warriors. Often, female members of the tribe were aware their children were listening and their conversations became livelier.

Once the boys reached the age of five or six they were often found along with other boys imitating the adult warriors. Two-Leggings, famed Crow Warrior remarked, “There is much to a boy’s life. Even the gathering of wisdom is play. Many of our games had a purpose in those days.”<sup>150</sup> One of the best times to explore and learn for these young boys was during the moving of the camp. They moved through different parts of the country during different times of the year. More importantly, they experienced many aspects of Crow life such as the leadership determining where to move, the scouts moving ahead of the camp, and the social bonding that occurred during these moves.

“We moved camp very often, and it was great fun. As soon as the crier rode through the village telling the people to get ready to travel, I would find my young friends and we would catch up our horses as fast as the herders brought them in. Lodges would come down quickly, horse would be packed, travois loaded, and then away we would go to some new place we boys had never seen before. The long line of pack-horses and travois reaching farther than we could see, the dogs and bands of loose horses,

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<sup>149</sup> Linderman, *Plenty Coups*, 7 – 9.

<sup>150</sup> Peter Nabokov, *Two Leggings: The Making of a Crow Warrior* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 5.

all sweeping across the rolling plains or up a mountain trail to some mysterious destination, made our hearts sing with joy,” explained Plenty Coups.

Thomas LeForge, a white trader living among the Crow was aware of how boys learned much during the moving of a camp. He recalled, “It was an occasion bringing me special enjoyment if I should kill a deer or an elk along the way. It is a recollection held in a favored corner of my memory; this event brought a swarm of little Indians to do butchering for me.” He went on to say, “of, how lively they were in this work! How rapidly and efficiently they could skin and cup up a deer.”<sup>151</sup>

By the time the boys were nearing puberty, they could be found serving as Ichkaatuaa, or Little Toes. By this time these young boys had been involved in some type of warfare such as defense of the camp. More importantly they went along on war parties, only to serve as helpers to the warriors who did the actual fighting. They usually did the cooking, gathering wood and tending to the horses. They were also responsible to set up the shelters utilized by the warriors as they went to and from the enemy villages. However, if the occasion called for it, the boys did have to engage in warfare. Two-Leggings described his experience of having to engage the Blackfeet while serving as a Little Toe.

“Throwing off my pack, I knelt and shot the nearest Blackfeet, my arrow going through his neck and spinning him around. When I shot a second arrow into his arm he tried to pull it out. I shot a third into his shoulder and it bounced up and

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<sup>151</sup>Thomas B. Marquis, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian: Thomas H. LeForge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974,), 148 – 149.

down as he ran back to his friend... there was much singing on our return and I was mention as the only one who had wounded a Piegan”<sup>152</sup>

Once the young males reached a certain age they would often enter into warrior societies, usually joining the father’s society or the older brother’s, if a father had been killed.<sup>153</sup> The Crows recognize four main societies which are the Fox, Muddy Hands, Lump woods, and the Big Dogs. A fifth society also existed, but it was less organized and structured as the other four. The reason for this was because any one could join at any time, and once a person joined, they basically committed themselves to giving their lives for the sake of the camp.<sup>154</sup> The members of this society gave a vow to all others that they would die in battle, but not foolishly. If a group of warriors were being pursued by a much larger number of enemies, the Crazy Dogs were obliged to dismount and fight until the death, ensuring that his comrades escaped successfully. Often times the members of this society lived a reckless lifestyle. These warrior societies were extremely vital in the survival of the Crows as they were the main protectorates and providers of the camps. They maintained order within the camp and regulated the hunts as they saw fit, as well as carrying out the orders of the chiefs.<sup>155</sup> Each year, the head chief appointed a different warrior society to serve as a policing unit, and they had considerable authority because of the appointment. This was often noticed by visitors.

While living among the Crows, Edwin Denig observed how only one Crow had been killed by another Crow in over twelve years. He believed that this was in large part

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<sup>152</sup> Nabokov, *Two Leggings*, 18-19.

<sup>153</sup> Old Horn, McCleary, *Social Family Structure*, 9.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Larocque, *Journals of Larocque*, 209.

due to the strict and rigid system of laws the Crows followed.<sup>156</sup> More importantly it was because of the order maintained by the appointed warrior societies. If any members of the tribe acted against the wishes of the leaders, the society members would quickly punish them “by a beating or their arms are broken and tents cut to pieces.”<sup>157</sup> Other punishments were also inflicted such as shaving the mane and tail of horses owned by the guilty parties. This act severely affected a person because the horses were such an important part of a person’s life. They would also go as far as cutting a person’s tipi to pieces and whipping them.<sup>158</sup> Also, if a chief promises another tribe that they would keep a peace among them, the police would ensure that his orders were carried out and keep the young men eager to gain war honors from raiding that particular tribe. “These people also are remarkable for never being the first to break a peace between them and other nations,” noted Denig. The strict policy and rigid adherence to beliefs were the major reason why the Crows were so organized, but the family system was equally important in maintaining order within the tribe.

Another contributing factor for the strict order maintained in Crow camps is the way in which members believed they were close to the environment in which they lived. They thoroughly understood the world around them, and this understanding went into the everyday world including the natural environment.<sup>159</sup> They believed that everything contained within the world, such as plants and animals, was important to the circle of life. They placed a high regard in objects that were representative of certain powers, and more importantly they were rigid in conducting ceremonies honoring these objects. For

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<sup>156</sup> Denig, *Of the Crow Nation*, 150.

<sup>157</sup> Larocque, *Journal of Larocque*, 210.

<sup>158</sup> Leonard, *Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, 232.

<sup>159</sup> Voget, *The World of the Crow Indians*, 3.

example, Crows recognize the sacredness of tobacco as this was the main reason they came onto the plains, and because they regarded it as an important part of their history and celebrated the tobacco planting ceremony every year.<sup>160</sup>

The process of honoring sacred objects became quite a task for the Crows, and like other rituals they were adamant about performing them as instructed, either by a medicine man or in a vision. Zenas Leonard noticed how devoted tribes were to certain objects: “It is customary for every tribe of Indians in the regions of the Rocky Mountains to have some instrument or article to pay homage to and invoke, but no nation, I believe are so devoutly attached to their talismans as the Crow Nation – It is their life – Their very existence.”<sup>161</sup> This is especially true if the Crows felt this object brought good fortune, or if it was given to them by a successful leader of the tribe. They felt the object had some responsibility in bringing the person who owned it great fortune and luck in the hunt or warfare. They held these items in such high regards, that they placed more importance on the object than they did on their horses, clothing, or weapons.<sup>162</sup> Without it, they felt they were poor miserable people, not worthy of calling themselves a Crow. The only other thing they held just as sacred was the family, which in the case of the Crows is an intricate complex system.

Throughout the times of intense interaction and change, the Crows held tightly to their beliefs and belief systems. They found unique ways of incorporating Crow and Euro-American culture into a new and unique culture. Religion, politics and family ties were areas the Crows modified, while education and warfare in the traditional sense all but disappeared. Furthermore, the Crow people found various ways to keep the culture

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<sup>160</sup> For an in-depth account of the tobacco ceremony see Lowie, *Crow Indians*, p. 274 – 296.

<sup>161</sup> Leonard, *Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, 229.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, 229-230.



intact, especially in celebrations and religious ceremonies. Today, Crows are struggling to keep these traits intact as they navigate into the twenty-first century.

## Chapter IV

### Chiefs in transition

In 1892, Agent for the Crow Indians M. P. Wyman instructed his boss farmers in the various districts of the reservation to inform the Indians to move away from their traditional life ways. Wyman wanted the Crows to live like the white men, taking on traditional Euro-American roles such as farmers and ranchers. In order to accomplish this task he first had to force the Crows into abandoning their old lifestyle, which many had already done. The buffalo had almost become extinct, while inter-tribal warfare ceased to exist. However, many of the Crows continued to follow traditional leaders, men such as Plenty Coups, Two-Leggings, and others who had become leaders during earlier times. The main objective under Wyman's administration of the Crows was to force the Crow chiefs out of their leadership roles. His instructions were clear when he ordered the Crows, "the Great Father wants all of his Indian children to talk for themselves."<sup>163</sup> This was a clear indication of how the Agents, with the backing of the U.S. government wanted to assimilate the Indians into mainstream American society, by forcing them to abandon their traditional leaders.

During the late nineteenth century it was evident the Crows were undergoing a critical transition in their history, especially concerning the leadership of the tribe. With the end of inter-tribal warfare, members of the Crow could no longer gain honors and become leaders among their people. New leaders would emerge to guide the Crow into the twentieth century. However, it is important to understand that these types of

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<sup>163</sup> Letter from U.S. Indian agent, Crow Agency, Montana, to Farm Bosses 1892, Hoxie Crow Collections, Box 3:5, Little Big Horn College Crow Agency.

transitional phases were not uncommon in Crow history. Beginning with No-Vitals in the mid-fifteenth century, the Crow Nation was able to select leaders that could guide the tribe through difficult times. More importantly, the people selected as leaders were able to help their people adapt to their surroundings and incorporate new technology as it became available, while continuing to maintain values important to the people. These values included kinship, religion, education and the clan systems. These men and women who were selected were often meticulous in their daily habits, even in their rituals. For example, Sore Belly never publicly prayed, but conducted his prayer ritual in private.<sup>164</sup> This may have been because his helpers or spirits helping him instructed him to act in this manner. Crow chief Plenty Coups, even in his old age did not allow children to be around his medicine bundle. Evelyn Old Elk remembers going to Pryor as a child and playing with her friends at a Tobacco Planting ceremony. While playing, she accidentally ran near Plenty Coups bundle that was hanging from a tri-pod. She remembers Plenty Coups yelling at her and whipping her with a willow stick telling her not to go near it. She remarked at how everyone “thought he was a great man but to me he was a mean person.”<sup>165</sup>

It was the rigid adherence to these types of rituals regarding a person’s medicine bundles that was believed to bring a person good or bad luck. More importantly the bundles were a sacred object and held in high regards by the owners. The leaders of the tribe often had bundles that were very powerful, which were used in governing the Crow Nation. Frank Linderman wrote: “A medicine-bundle contains the medicine or talisman

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<sup>164</sup> Bernardis, Tim *Crow Social Studies: Teachers Guide* (Crow Agency, MT: Bilingual Materials Development Center, 1986), 45.

<sup>165</sup> Old Elk, Evelyn. Personal interview, conducted May 2003. Mrs. Old Elk was laughing while she was telling me this, although she respected him she always remembers him for the whipping he gave her.

of its possessor. Often the skin and Stuffed head of an animal as large as a wolf is used. Sometimes, however, the bundles are small containing the skin, claws teeth, or heads of lesser creatures, depending wholly upon what animal or bird offered 'help' to the dreamer. The medicine-bundle is of first importance, the possessor believing implicitly that the superlative power of the animal or bird that offered aid in his dream is always at hand and at his service when he is in need. The contents of these bundles are secret and sacred to the Indian."<sup>166</sup> Crow Chiefs often possessed one or more bundles that were considered very powerful, especially in aiding in the tribes good fortune.

The main factor in gaining a leadership role within the tribe was being successful in battle. The Crows relied heavily on a merit based system, one that required a man or woman to be successful in accumulating war honors or exploits, also known as coups. The Crows recognized four deeds necessary in becoming a chief.<sup>167</sup>

1. The touching of an enemy while engaged in battle was one of the requirements of becoming a chief among the Crows. A Bow, gun, Coups Stick or the hand could be used to touch an enemy and count as a war exploit.
2. Once the horse was integrated into the culture of the Crows, as well as the plains tribe, the taking of a picketed horse from an enemy camp was included as a requisite.
3. The taking of an enemy's weapon during battle was another exploit that was counted toward the four requirements.
4. Finally, the successful leading of a war party needed to be accomplished in order to be considered a chief. This exploit was probably the most difficult as

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<sup>166</sup> Linderman, *Plenty Coups*, 43.

<sup>167</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 5. See also, McCleary and Old Horn, 20.

the definition of a successful war party was to gain honors on the field of battle, and bring everyone back to camp safe and unharmed.<sup>168</sup>

There was no required order in which an individual completed the requisites, but some deeds were considered more significant than others. For example, Thomas LeForge, a white man who married into and lived with the Crows, noted how significant some of the exploits were, while counting coup on a woman was not as glorious as one counted on a man.<sup>169</sup> Apparently, LeForge, while accompanying a Crow war party during the Battle of Pryor Creek remembered, “At the end of the battle of Pryor Creek, when we were chasing the Sioux over the hills, I counted coup upon one of their women. She was on a horse, but I outrode(sic) her and caught up with her. I lashed her once with my pony-whip and turned aside to go on. Just as I passed her she jerked up a pistol and shot at me. Although a coup counted upon a woman was not ranked highly, it seemed this one came near being very expensive for me.”<sup>170</sup>

Counting Coup was not limited to just the enemy of the Crows, nor was it limited to Indians. Thomas Fitzpatrick, then a fur trader, had ventured far into Crow country and was invited to meet with several Crow chiefs. “While Tom was gone, a pack of young Crow warriors visited his camp. They carried off one hundred horses, all of his good and beaver traps. To add insult to injury, when they met Fitzpatrick on the way home, they took his rifle, stripped the capote from his back –even took his watch. He reached camp

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<sup>168</sup> McCleary and Old Horn, 6. See also Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 5, and McCleary, *Ghosts on the Land*, 82.

<sup>169</sup> Marquis, Thomas B. *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian : Thomas H. LeForge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1974)173 -176.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*,

wearing only a gee-string and moccasins – and his scalp.”<sup>171</sup> In this encounter a Crow warrior likely counted several Coups, such as taking of a horse from a camp, touching an enemy, and the taking of a weapon from an enemy. Also, if the group of Crows were on a war path, the leader could count this as a successful raid.

Some of the war honors were formulated by a war leader when the moment called for it. They were utilized by a war leader if and when he felt it was necessary, or if the war deed might help in a tactical strike. These types of war honors known as “War Honors of the Day” were not uncommon. For instance, when a war party under the leadership of Red Bear sighted a Shoshone camp he stated, “Yonder camp is the enemy. There will be three coups to strike and count,” stated Red Bear. “First, there will be the usual, the striking of the enemy [first coup]; second, the one who strikes the lodge farthest upriver will count; third, the one who strikes the lodge furthest downstream will count. There will be three coups for this war party. Know that all of you.”<sup>172</sup> One possible reason Red Bear included the second and a third coup so as to disperse his warriors throughout the camp causing the Shoshone to panic and flee. If this happened then a rout of the Shoshone would likely occur.

Lieutenant James Bradley who led Crow Scouts for the army wrote, “There are no hereditary chiefs, but those in authority acquire their influence by their prowess in war and general usefulness to the tribe and their influence may be said to be only temporary as a reverse in war greatly diminishes the number of their followers.”<sup>173</sup> What Bradley is referring to is that a Crow can become chief so long as he is successful in warfare, but at

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<sup>171</sup> Stanley Vestal. *Jim Bridger: Mountain Man* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1970), 99-100.

<sup>172</sup> McCleary, *Ghosts Writings*, 82 -83.

<sup>173</sup> Bradley, James H., “The Bradley Manuscript: Arapooash,” *Montana Historical Society Contributions*, (1923). P. 209.

the first sign or indication that a leader has been unsuccessful, many people begin to lose faith in him. As a result they can lose their social standing overnight, and more importantly they can lose their status as a chief. This was one of the major reasons why the Crows took much time in the training and raising of the warriors among their people.

The Crow chiefs were aware of the dramatic changes that surrounded them. The Horse and Gun brought about a change so spectacular, that tribes on the northern plains quickly centered their lives around these two elements. Warfare, population, and mobility increased to create a unique and violent culture known as the Horse culture period. Intertribal warfare, as it was known resulted in the development of a complex system associated to status, power and privilege.<sup>174</sup> Adjustments were made by the Crow leaders as they began to train their young men in the art of warfare. Simple games such as arrow throwing, the Shiny game and hoop-and-pole games were all utilized in strength and conditioning purposes.<sup>175</sup> These games also improved a player's hand-eye coordination, critical in shooting at game or an enemy, especially while on the move. Because of the changes surrounding them, the Crows began to incorporate a rigid structure in the way they raised their young males.

As the Crows made their way through the proto-historic period in which they obtained Euro-American goods, leaders of the nation had to take into consideration the new technologies available to them. They also had to begin thinking about the shift in the population on the Northern Plains as tribes such as the Lakota emerged to force the

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<sup>174</sup> Grinnell, George Bird "Coups and Scalps among the Plains Indians," *American Anthropologist* 12 (1910) 296-310.

<sup>175</sup> McCleary and Old Horn, *Crow Socio-Familial Kinship Text*, 21.

Crows out of their traditional hunting grounds in the Black Hills.<sup>176</sup> This new era of the Horse and Gun likely forced the Crows to recognize leaders who were successful in war. Beginning with Young White Buffalo (Late 1600's), the Crow began a pattern in which leadership roles had to include three important elements. First was the success in war, or the completion of required war exploits.<sup>177</sup> Next was the medicine bundle possessed by a person and the power of the bundle, or bundles of an individual. Finally, and most importantly for this work was how these leaders could lead the Crow through the evolutionary period from being afoot to the horse culture period and through the different periods of the reservation era. Although many men probably made it to the status of chief, not many are remembered as great leaders, by both Crows and Whites. In the following pages I want to examine several chiefs who had become prominent during this time and examine why they became more prominent than other chiefs in the Crow Nation.

Beginning with Young White Buffalo, the Crows began the transition of incorporating European goods. The vast Indian trade network had brought the Crows items such as metal knives. These knives “had handles of bone, dyed blue,” which the Crows had obtained from their Hidatsa relatives.<sup>178</sup> Young White Buffalo was probably quick in identifying these items as important for the Crow. He had ascended to the status of chief around the turn of the eighteenth century, when these goods were just beginning

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<sup>176</sup> For an account of Sioux expansion onto the Northern Plains see Richard White, “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *The Journal of American History*, Volume 65, issue 2 (Sept., 1978), 319 – 344.

<sup>177</sup> Once the horse was completely incorporated into the Crow culture, one of the requirements became the horse, which may have replaced the luring of people out of camps before the arrival of the horse.

<sup>178</sup> Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indians: selection of photographs*, 46.



to reach the Crow people.<sup>179</sup> He was an accomplished warrior who possessed many attributes desirable for being a chief among the Crows. It is likely the Crows possessed many chiefs during this time, but Young White Buffalo was one of the few who remains significant in Crow History.

He was well known for the powers he possessed, such as his ability as a warrior, his sagacity as a leader, and for his medicine powers. The jack-rabbit was his medicine helper, which was important to him as he always went into battle with a shield that had the head of a jack-rabbit peering through the hole on the shield, and the tail of this animal tied to his medicine-lock.<sup>180</sup> Besides being an accomplished warrior, he also possessed a keen sense of understanding of the changing world around him as Young White Buffalo was credited with bringing the horse to the Crows, and transforming them from a walking people to a riding people.<sup>181</sup> On a war-party expedition, Young White Buffalo led his group against the Rib-men, or the Winnebago, somewhere on the Green river.<sup>182</sup> From this war-party he brought back the horse and from that time the Crows have incorporated the horse into their culture. He likely prompted his people to adopt the horse as he understood the significance of this animal. He probably knew the horse would bring to his people wealth and power, but more importantly that the horse would be significant in their survival on the Plains, especially against other tribes who already possessed the animal. Young White Buffalo was very instrumental in taking advantage of the new technologies brought to the Crow, and understood the importance of adapting the animal into Crow culture.

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<sup>179</sup> Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow places Young White Buffalo as a chief about 1734, see *From the Heart of Crow Country*, 23.

<sup>180</sup> Curtis, 47.

<sup>181</sup> Medicine Crow, 23.

<sup>182</sup> Curtis, 47.

Plays-With-His-Face was another chief significant in Crow history, and its survival in the new world that was thrust upon the tribe. He got his name because “he would paint his face carefully, then before the day was half gone he would wash it and apply another color. He was a principle chief among the River Crows, and a contemporary to the more famous Sore Belly and Red Plume at the Temple(Long Hair).<sup>183</sup> His medicine powers are well known in Crow history. He had three in his possession. The first was the dragonfly, second was the sun and third was the grizzly bear. All were equally important, but the grizzly bear was probably the best known of his medicine. Apparently he had encountered a grizzly while watering his horse somewhere on the Little Big Horn River. The bear lifted him up, and showed him the four seasons of the year and told him he would live to see them. Next, the bear opened its mouth and had Plays With His Face reach in to its open mouth. He could feel no teeth, and the bear told Plays With His Face that he too would be like this, meaning he would live to an old age.<sup>184</sup> Because of this encounter he was reckless in war as he believed nothing could kill him.

The reason he was so well known was due to his display of intelligence in the art of Plains warfare. He was able to take all the new European introductions like the Horse, gun and metals and fusing them, along with Crow warfare techniques, to keep the Crows alive. He likely understood that the Crows needed these items, but more importantly they had to infuse them into their culture. He led many successful war parties, but two main warriors whom he went to war with were Small On The Back and Hump Bull, who probably understood much of what Plays With His Face understood in terms of warfare.

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<sup>183</sup> Bernardis, *Crow Social Studies*, 43.

<sup>184</sup> See *Medicine Crow*, 26-28 and Bernardis, 42-43.

He is legendary for his valor and recklessness in warfare, and was a terror to enemy tribes. Unfortunately, Plays With His Face did not make it to the prophesized age that he received in his vision, nor did he die in warfare, but instead died of the white man's small pox.<sup>185</sup>

Chief Red Plume (Feather) At The Temple, also known as Chief Long Hair was chief during the early part of the nineteenth century. A timeline of Crow chiefs compiled by the Crow studies department at Little Big Horn College gives his birth circa 1750, and death at 1836.<sup>186</sup> Under his leadership, the Crows became very prosperous and powerful because Long Hair was able to gain the respect of his people, his enemies and the newly arrived white men. He ascended to chief by completing certain tasks, but he was unique for several reasons. His Medicine helpers likely included both the Sun and the Morning star, both obvious elements observed on a daily basis by Indians and non-Indians. He had fasted on a highpoint on the headwaters of Owl Creek in present day Wolf Mountains, where he was adopted by the Morning Star and received a powerful vision.<sup>187</sup> His followers were reminded of his medicine on a daily basis because they probably watched the Morning Star disappear and be replaced by the Sun. His medicine was also represented in the painting of his face whenever he went on war or horse raiding parties. He would paint his face Yellow and place a red circle around it representing either the Sun or the Morning Star.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Bernardis, 44.

<sup>186</sup> Edward S. Curtis also believes Long Hair died in 1836, so if the birth is close it would put his age in the mid-80. See Curtis, *North American Indians*, 47.

<sup>187</sup> Dr. Medicine Crow and Edward Curtis name the morning star as his medicine, but Pretty Shield says it was the Sun that was his medicine. In any case he probably performed his daily rituals in the morning when the Morning Star was giving way to the sun at dusk, this may have cause the confusion. Se Medicine Crow, 83. Curtis, 47 and Linderman, *Pretty Shield*, 221.

<sup>188</sup> Bernardis, 46.

Chief Long Hair was an impressive looking individual, firstly for his height. George Caitlin observed: “They are really a handsome and well-formed set of men a can be seen in any part of the world.” He continued “I observed the other day, that most of them were over six feet high.”<sup>189</sup> However, the most significant physical feature of this chief was the length of his hair. Edwin Denig wrote, “The principal man after the chief above named, (Sore Belly) was Long Hair, so called from having hair on his head 36 feet in length.”<sup>190</sup> His hair was described as “A red stick with eagle-feathers fastened to it perpendicularly was thrust upright in his hair which was rolled up in a bag of Antelope skin supported by a thong passing over one shoulder.”<sup>191</sup> As a young man Chief Long Hair made a prediction that he would become a great chief, and the tribe, under his guidance, would reach the peak of its power. He foretold of how the tribe would grow in strength as the length of his hair increased.<sup>192</sup> Long Hair was known as Fool Boy when he was a youngster, because he made a prediction that one day he would be a great chief. Members of the tribe who heard his predictions ridiculed him and challenged him to make his predictions come true. He fasted often and eventually led his first war party in which he was successful, bringing back many scalps and captives. After several successful parties, he entered his lodge one night and emerged the next day with his hair quite noticeably longer than the day before. Soon, his hair was exceedingly long, and he became a successful warrior and chief.<sup>193</sup> Under his leadership the tribe became very powerful and his predictions came true. There were several different measurements

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<sup>189</sup> Caitlin, 49.

<sup>190</sup> Denig, *Of the Crow Nation*, 193

<sup>191</sup> Curtis, *North American Indians*, 47.

<sup>192</sup> Medicine Crow, “Great Chieftains,” 31.

<sup>193</sup> Bradley, “The Bradley Manuscript – Book F,” p. 224-225.

conducted as to the length of his hair, and different measurements were claimed, but in any case a portion of his hair remains in the possession of Chief Plenty Coups Park.<sup>194</sup>

Chief Long Hair openly interacted with the white men, often inviting them to live in his lodge as they wintered with the Crow. They referred to him as a hospitable and a gracious host.<sup>195</sup> It was apparent Long Hair understood the importance of gaining the trust of these people, but more importantly making his followers understand the importance of the white man's friendship. He appeared to be a person who understood the changing world around him. Long Hair was a leader during a time when interaction with white men increased, and he watched as different governments approached the Crows and tried to gain favor with them, including the Spanish, French, English and eventually the United States. To navigate and lead a tribe during this time was not an easy task, but Long Hair was able to find a way for the Crows to incorporate Crow culture, Plains culture and Euro-American culture into one. During his leadership, he was one of the advocates of accepting the Friendship treaty presented to them at Knife River in 1825.<sup>196</sup> The treaty presented to the Crows was significant in Crow history because it recognized the U.S. as an ally, but more importantly gave the Americans the confidence that the Crows could be trusted. This mutual trust is apparent as Crows served as Scouts and soldiers since that time, and continue to serve to this day in the United States Military.

Toward the end of his life, chief Long Hair made three predictions. He told his people, "there will come a night longer than ever was known upon the earth before."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Bernardis, *Social Studies*, 46.

<sup>195</sup> Caitlin, *North American Indians*, 50.

<sup>196</sup> Hoxie, *Parading Through History*, 61-61.

<sup>197</sup> Bradley, "Bradley Manuscript- Book F." p. 227.

Second, he told his people that wolves will be so numerous that they will fill Crow villages, and devour horses before the owner's eyes. Finally, and most importantly, he told of how one day the white men would, "swarm over the land of the Crows in such numbers as the Crows never imagined of any people. Afterward the Crows shall decay and never again be as powerful as in the past."<sup>198</sup> All of the predictions made by Long Hair came true as the Crows witnessed an eclipse, and during a severe winter wolves began wandering into Crow camps and eating the horses of the Crows while they watched. The most obvious is the last prediction of how the white men would be numerous, and of how the Crow culture would soon begin to disappear. Fortunately, other leaders were able to guide the tribe through the hard times Long Hair predicted to maintain the culture that was created as a result of his leadership.

Chiefs such as these men were instrumental in preparing the Crow to enter a new era in their history. They made significant contributions while leading their respective bands but unbeknownst to the Crow a much more difficult time was yet to come. The question became-who would lead the tribe into this era of transition, which included treaties, confinement to reservations and the loss of many traditional life ways. Fortunately, other leaders emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to guide the Crow people through these turbulent times.

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter V

### Struggle against the Sioux

Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, the Sioux have been viewed as the prototype of plains Indians, in some cases the prototype for all American Indians.<sup>199</sup> Their image came to national attention in large part because of their resistance to American encroachment, their refusal to accept reservations, and their reluctance to abandon their old way of life. Sioux leaders such as Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Crazy horse represented the Indians' fight for survival. Under their leadership, the Sioux won many battles against the U.S. Army, including the great victory over Custer and the Seventh Cavalry at the Little Bighorn in 1876.<sup>200</sup> The Battle of the Little Bighorn became the fight the Sioux won, but it also signified the end for the Plains Indians. However, for the Crows, their choice to serve as scouts unintentionally preserved their way of life longer than most of the tribes that surrounded them.

The Crows, unknowingly, had aided the whites in this conflict that ended the life they had enjoyed. However, the Crows' struggle for survival did not begin with the Battle of the Little Big Horn, but actually began once they entered the Northern Plains. They constantly found themselves fighting off invaders from other tribes, but none as troublesome as the Sioux. In reality, the Crows found themselves always struggling to defend their homelands from the Sioux.<sup>201</sup> The struggle for survival began once the

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<sup>199</sup> Kehoe, Alice B. *North American Indians: a comprehensive account*, (Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 302-303.

<sup>200</sup> For an in-depth account of the Sioux Wars see John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876* (Fort Collins, CO: Old Army Press, 1976; George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A history of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956); James C. Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

<sup>201</sup> White, "The Winning of the West," 327, 333.

Sioux arrived, and many battles and skirmishes occurred between the two nations, in which the Sioux greatly outnumbered the Crow. In some cases, the Sioux allied with other tribes such as the Blackfeet and the Cheyenne, in an attempt to displace or wipe out the Crows.<sup>202</sup> Fortunately, the Crows survived the onslaught of the Sioux, a traditional enemy of the Crows.

The Sioux invasion of Crow country is an interesting story that demonstrates how the Crows were able to maintain their homelands against a formidable enemy, but also maintain their culture. The Teton Sioux are made up of seven different bands, which include the Sans Arc, Two Kettles, Miniconjou, Ogallala, Blackfoot, Hunkpapa and the Brule. In the seventeenth century, the various Sioux bands occupied most of what is now Minnesota: their lands lay between the Cheyenne to the South and the Ojibwa (Chippewa) in Wisconsin.<sup>203</sup> Although the Sioux were more powerful than their chief enemies the Chippewa, they were no match for their foes' newly acquired metal weapons, especially the firearms.<sup>204</sup> These new and dangerous weapons were acquired from French, and British trappers and traders.<sup>205</sup>

Once the Chippewa held the advantage, they began an unrelenting assault on their longtime foe. Scores of Sioux warriors were being killed, and many more knew that their medicine was no match for the fire stick. At the same time the lure of buffalo on the plains aided in the decision of the Sioux to migrate west. Eventually they were forced out of their homelands and made their way into what is now the Black Hills, territory of

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, 333-334.

<sup>203</sup> Kehoe, *North American Indians*, 302-303.

<sup>204</sup> Hyde, *Red Clouds Folk*, 3.

<sup>205</sup> White, "The Winning of the West," 322.



the Crow Indians.<sup>206</sup> While en route into the West, the Sioux made short work of several tribes that resisted their encroachment, such as the Arickara who controlled the Missouri River area east of the Black Hills. Once they entered the Black Hills, the Sioux quickly displaced the Crow and Kiowa nations who controlled that area. They also made their presence felt to surrounding tribes in large part because of their sheer numbers.<sup>207</sup>

In the early part of the nineteenth century, warfare between the Sioux and the Crow escalated, especially when white fur traders began to move into the area, bringing guns with them. They brought other foreign trade goods, but none as critical as the gun, which allowed the tribes to at least defend themselves from their enemies that possessed the weapon.

The first recorded hostility between the Crow and the Sioux occurred around 1785 or 1786. Apparently, Bears' Ears, a Brule, and Broken-Leg-Duck, an Oglala had attempted to take horses from the Crows. The Crows discovered the pair, and killed them. This skirmish occurred in, or near the Black Hills, which the Crows still controlled at the time. This began a war that lasted until the Sioux were subdued by the U. S. Army after the Little Big Horn. This also marked the beginning of a strong Sioux presence in the Northern Plains.<sup>208</sup>

Francois Antoine Larocque, who visited the Crows in the early part of the nineteenth century, witnessed the Crow and Sioux engaged in warfare, but usually on a small scale. From that time forward the conflicts began increasing steadily as the Sioux

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>207</sup> Hyde, *Red Clouds Folk*, 18-20, 24; White, "The Winning of the West," 327.

<sup>208</sup> Hyde, *Red Clouds Folk*, 24.

became a permanent neighbor.<sup>209</sup> The Crows were able to repel the relatively few Sioux war parties, but by the 1830s, the two tribes began fighting on another level. The battles began to include entire bands, which made the stakes higher. For example, Zenas Leonard, the fur trapper and trader witnessed a large battle involving a Crow band and a Sioux war party. He wrote, “When the express reached the Crow village every man, woman, and child able to point a gun or mount a horse repaired with all speed to the scene of action, who came up uttering the most wild and piercing yells I ever hear in my life.”<sup>210</sup>

In one event in 1834, the Sioux surprised Sore Belly and his band of River Crows. According to accounts of tribal elders, Sore Belly and his people were on the edge of defeat. His entire band was under attack and he must have realized that if the Sioux were victorious, they would likely murder many of his people. Wearing a war bonnet with a tail that floated six feet behind him, Sore Belly rode forward to lead a last-minute rout of the Sioux.<sup>211</sup> As a result, the band was saved, and the Crows continued to dominate the area.

Six years later, Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, a Belgian priest, reported that the Crows continued to rule the Yellowstone. “The Crows are considered the most indefatigable marauders of the plains,” he wrote in his journal. “Their country seems to stretch from the Black Hills to the Rocky Mountains, embracing the Wind River Mountains and all the plains and valleys watered by that stream, as well as by the

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<sup>209</sup> White shows the increasing conflict between the Crows and the Sioux in the nineteenth century. White, “The Winning of the West,” 319-343.

<sup>210</sup> Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, 239.

<sup>211</sup> Smells, Joseph. Interviewed, 1998.

Yellowstone and Powder rivers. I rode with this camp for two days, they had plenty of everything.”<sup>212</sup>

By the 1840s, the tide of good fortune had begun to turn against the Crows. A steady stream of white settlers started moving west in search of new lands, especially lands containing gold. Feeling the pressures of the westward migration by the whites the Sioux moved further west into Crow Country. Instead of retreating, the Crows resisted the Sioux encroachments, with warfare being a constant theme between the two tribes. The conflict between the Sioux and the Crows carried on into the 1860’s, but the most challenging times were yet to occur. In 1860 or 1861, a major battle occurred between the Crow and the Sioux. This battle came know to be as, “the battle of Pryor Creek,” or what the Crows call, “Where the entire Camp is surrounded.”<sup>213</sup> The clash took place about twenty miles south of present-day Billings, Montana. According to Dr. Joe Medicine Crow, the Sioux leaders made plans for the battle by telling the warriors, “Let us kill the men and save the boys to be trained as Lakota warriors. This we must do to become strong and able to stop the white man in his relentless pursuit of us.”<sup>214</sup> Fortunately, the Crows were able to resist the Sioux attacks, but paid heavily in numbers of warriors.

During the 1860s, the Crows were faced with yet another challenge, a challenge that eventually ended a way of life. The discovery of gold brought a tremendous surge of whites into the West in 1860. As a result the Sioux moved deeper into Crow country. That year, gold seekers found gold in Nez Perce country on the Clearwater River. Other

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<sup>212</sup> Pierre-Jean DeSmet, S. J., *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, S. J.* Hiram Marin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson, eds. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), Vol. 1, 238.

<sup>213</sup> Medicine Crow, Joseph *From the Heart of Crow Country*, (Orion Books: New York, 1992), p. 64-78.

<sup>214</sup> Herman Viola, *Little Big Horn Remembered: The untold Indian story of Custer’s Last Stand* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 107.

rivers, such as the Salmon, the Boise, and the tributaries of the Snake River heading in Oregon, also produced gold. Prospectors soon began to branch out following other rivers in hopes of making major strikes. By 1861, gold seekers turned up gold on the headwaters of the Missouri River resulting in thousands of white people flooding into Montana.<sup>215</sup> The white population of Montana quickly increased, resulting in many Indian-white encounters, especially with the Sioux, who became increasingly hostile.<sup>216</sup>

About this time, a man by the name of John Bozeman discovered a route that blazed a trail through what the Sioux claimed as their hunting grounds. In reality, this trail actually crossed the land owned by the Crows, as specified under the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851.<sup>217</sup> The trail, which came to be known as the Bozeman Trail, became popular with many of the prospectors headed to the gold fields in western Montana. The Army, in order to protect prospectors from Indian attacks, erected three forts.<sup>218</sup> They were Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith. As a result, the Sioux focused their time and attention on closing the Forts. In reality what it did was it took a lot of time for the Sioux to carry out the attacks and left a relative calm between the Crow and the Sioux.

This period of relative peace allowed the Crows to focus on internal matters, such as naming of children, rearing of children and the overall practice of Crow life ways. It allowed young children to be taught the Crow culture while the Sioux were engaged in harassing the forts, so in essence it was likely a time when the Crow culture flourished without any outside interference. Meanwhile, Red Cloud the Sioux leader began to rise

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<sup>215</sup> Utley, Robert M., *The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846 – 1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 71-72

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>217</sup> A description of the Crow lands as a result of the 1851 Fort Laramie treaty can be found in Norman B. Plummer, *Crow Indians: The Crow Tribe of Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), 26.

<sup>218</sup> Utley, *Indian Frontier*, 100-101.

to prominence amongst his people because of his attitude towards the whites and their forts. From 1866 through 1868 he and his Sioux Warriors continually harassed the forts eventually forcing the soldiers into three different battles, with the major one being the Fetterman fight.<sup>219</sup>

This battle signified the end of the Bozeman trail, but more importantly marked the renewed interest in Crow Lands by the hostile Sioux. Once the trail was closed another treaty, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 was concluded. The treaty clearly defined the Boundaries of the various reservations, but for the Crow it was not clear as to where the boundaries of the Crow reservation were. The government had been forced to recognize the southeastern portions of Montana and northeastern part of Wyoming as “unceded lands,” which quickly became a problem for the Crow. Since it was unceded, the Sioux could hunt freely on these portions of land on or near the Crow reservation.<sup>220</sup> Also, with the signing of the treaty the Sioux demanded lead and powder, which was likely to be used to resume the war with the Crows.<sup>221</sup>

This became increasingly evident as the situation between the Sioux, the whites and the Crow remained unchanged from 1868 through 1874. The Sioux continued to attack and harass whites, while sending raiding parties against the Crows. However, the situation worsened in 1874 when gold was discovered in the Black Hills, resulting in thousands of miners flooding the gold fields in search of quick wealth. The Sioux

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<sup>219</sup> Don Ricky Jr., *Forty Miles a day on Beans and Hay* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 7.

<sup>220</sup> Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and his Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 283; Plummer, *Crow Indians*, 85.

<sup>221</sup> Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 80-81.

responded by attacking the miners entering the Black Hills, while continuing to keep up the war with the Crow people.<sup>222</sup>

Initially, the government tried to stop white prospectors from entering the Black Hills, which was promised to them under the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty.<sup>223</sup> However, once the situation got out of control, the government changed its policy, which was no longer to prevent the whites from entering the Black Hills.<sup>224</sup> At first the government attempted to buy the Black Hills, but once the Sioux refused, they took a tougher approach. They quickly declared the Sioux had broken the 1868 treaty by their raiding along the borders of the unceded territory and turned the situation over to the war department. The two senior officers, generals William Sherman and Philip H. Sheridan devised a plan that would end the turmoil on the northern plains. They issued an ultimatum to all non-reservation Sioux ordering them back to their designated reservations or they would be driven in by force.<sup>225</sup> A deadline was set and once the deadline passed a plan was created to corral and force the Sioux away from the Black Hills and the gold fields. For the Crow it seemed like good news, to finally rid Crow Country of the Sioux and bring peace back to the people, however what lay ahead would forever change the course of Crow history.

The plan called for a three-pronged attack, with one column originating from the Montana territory and headed by Colonel John Gibbon. General George Crook was to command the Wyoming column, which would leave Fort Fetterman, while General

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<sup>222</sup> Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and his Army*, 291-301; Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 171-175; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 217-230.

<sup>223</sup> Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 172.

<sup>224</sup> Gray, John S. *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 123-124.

<sup>225</sup> Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and his Army*, 301; Stewart, *Custer's Luck*, 76-77.

Alfred Terry headed the Dakota Column out of Fort Abraham Lincoln.<sup>226</sup> The army was confident that any of the columns that encountered the Indians could easily handle any resistance from the Indians. For the Crow people, the most interesting character to emerge from this army was a young officer named George Armstrong Custer. It was this individual who would greatly affect the Crow people economically, socially and historically, for generations to come.

Custer headed the Seventh Cavalry and was under General Alfred Terry from the Dakota Territory. The Crows first real contact with the military force came when several Crow warriors volunteered as scouts for the army. The army had come into a land that they knew little about, so under the 1866 act to increase the army, the president had authorized the enlistment of up to a thousand Indian Scouts.<sup>227</sup> The Crows were the ideal candidates because they knew the land, but more importantly they were fierce enemies of the Sioux. Along with pay, the Crows could take all the booty they could handle, but more importantly they could rid Crow country of the Sioux. In the spring of 1876, a large number of Crows volunteered to accompany the army against the Sioux, and more importantly several key figures from the Crows emerged as leaders after the Battle of the Little Big Horn. However, it took much persuasion from the side of the army to convince the Crows to serve as scouts.

On the morning of April 9<sup>th</sup> Gibbon, along with his officers, awaited the arrival of the Crow Chiefs. A short while later Dexter Clapp, Agent for the Crows, led the Crow

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<sup>226</sup> Hutton, *Phil Sheridan*, 302-303; W. A. Graham, *The Story of the Little Big Horn: Custer's Last Campaign*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), 6.

<sup>227</sup> Dunlay, Thomas W., *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the United States Army, 1860 – 90* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 44.

chiefs into the room where Gibbon and his men were waiting.<sup>228</sup> Gibbon was the first to address the Crow Chiefs via the French Canadian interpreter Pierre Shane. He stated, “ I have come down here to make war on the Sioux. The Sioux are your enemy and ours. For a long while, they have been killing white man and killing Crows. I am going to punish the Sioux for making war upon the white man. If the Crows want to make war upon the Sioux, now is their time. If they want to drive them for their country, and prevent them from sending war parties in their country, to murder their men and now is their time. If they want to get revenge for the Crows that have fallen, to get revenge for the killing of such men as the gallant soldier, Long Horse, now is their time.” Gibbon paused to give Shane a chance to translate then continued stating, “White men and red men make war in a different way. The white man goes through the country with his head down, and sees nothing. The red man keeps his eyes open, and can see better than a white man. Now, I want some young warriors of the Crow tribe to go with me, who will use their eyes, and tell me what they see. I don’t want men who will be willing to ride along with my men, and stay with the wagons. I have plenty of those. I want young, active, brave men, who will find out where the Sioux are, so that I can go after them. They will be soldiers of the Government, get soldiers’ pay, and soldier’s food, and, when I come back, will come back with me, and join their tribe.”<sup>229</sup>

While Gibbon sat waiting, he began to wonder about the interpreter’s ability to translate. As he later recalled, “They listened in silence to the interpreter as he translated, or appeared to translate what I said. For when he came to translate their answers to me

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<sup>228</sup> For an in depth account of the meeting between the army and the Crows see James H. Bradley, *The march of the Montana Column: A Prelude to the Custer Disaster* (Norman: University of Oklahoma press, 1961), 39-48; James Willirt, *To the edge of Darkness: A chronicle of the 1876 Indian war, General Gibbon’s Montana Column and the Reno Scout March*, (California: Upton and Sons Publishers, 1998), 41.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*



he strung his English words together in such a fearfully incongruous way as to make me tremble at the idea that my eloquent appeal to the chiefs had been murdered in the Crow tongue, as he was murdering the English in conveying to me their answer.”<sup>230</sup>

The head chief of the Mountain Crow band, Sits-In-The-Middle-Of-The-Land, then requested that interpreter Pierre Shane not translate the Crows’ meeting to the officers. Lieutenant Bradley, who witnessed the meeting, later wrote, “[Blackfoot] then spoke, for some time, in an animated manner, with impressive gestures, receiving frequent expressions of approval from his native audience. In air and fluency of speech, he appeared the orator. Having thus sounded the opinions of his brother chiefs, Blackfoot came forward, shook hands with the General, and gentlemen with him, returned to his place, gathered his robe about him, leaving one arm exposed and free, and, with easy dignity and grace, spoke.

He began by telling the soldiers of the situation that he and the other chiefs were in regarding Gibbon’s request. He stated, “The white people want us to assist them. I do not know the way of the whites; my people do not know their ways. The land we tread belongs to us, and we want our children always to dwell in it. All other Indian tribes do evil to the whites; but I, and my people, hold fast to them, with love. We want our reservation to be large; we want to go on eating buffalo; and so we hold fast to the whites. I am telling the truth to the white chief.” After allowing Shane to interpret his words, he continued, “our young men are before you; but they will not listen to what I say. If you want them to go with you, I would like them to go. But, if I tell them to go with you they will not obey.” Blackfoot continued to speak, mostly talking of his

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* Thomas LeForge, who was also at the meeting however, contradicts the statements made by Gibbon. He believed that Pierre chien[Shane] was very good. He stated that he was competent in his job as a translator. LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 206.

displeasure with the whites' broken promises regarding rations, but Gibbon interrupted saying, "I want to hear now from such men as want to get scalps and want to go to war?" However, according to White-Man-Runs-Him, the Crows by this time were wary of the promises made by the government.<sup>231</sup>

Dexter Clap, the Crows' agent, interjected, saying to the Crows, "Some time ago, war widows appeared before the chiefs, naked and bleeding from wounds they had given themselves in their grief, and besought them for revenge. Some of the young men promised to revenge them, that they might paint themselves black and cease to mourn. Now is the time for them to get that revenge."<sup>232</sup> Again, Gibbon stated, "I want to hear, now, from some of the fighting men, men such as Crazy Head, Spotted Horse, men that want to go to war."<sup>233</sup> At this point in the meeting a good number of the Crow Warriors had expressed their desire to attach themselves to the Army.<sup>234</sup> The meeting continued throughout most of the day until finally, the Chiefs retired to their lodges to discuss the situation.

The events leading to the battle of the Little Big Horn were a critical part of Crow history, but more importantly the events gives a non-Crow an in depth look into the culture of these people, and the actions they took because of their culture. Once the army approached the Crows to serve as scouts in an effort to return Sitting Bull and his people back to their reservations, it was highly likely they would have enlisted to become scouts in any case. Social pressure within the tribe likely would have forced many of the young warriors to enlist as scouts regardless of their social status. By this time in Crow history,

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<sup>231</sup> Dennis W. Harcey and Brian R. Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him: Crow Scout with Custer* (Illinois: Evanston Publishing Co., 1995), 76.

<sup>232</sup> Bradley, *March of the Montana Column*, 43.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>234</sup> LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 208.

and in general history on the Northern plains, it was obvious battles were of a limited nature. Many of the Crow warriors were probably finding it a little more difficult to attain status within their tribe in regards to counting coup in battle. With the increased number of whites entering the Northern Plains, and the relationship the Crows had with the whites, it likely became increasingly difficult to engage in warfare with surrounding tribes because of the buffer the whites had created between tribes. Chief Plenty Coups in his biography recalls the decision to remain friendly with the whites, especially once they entered the Northern Plains en masse.

“The Crows were wiser. We knew the white men were strong, without number in their own country, and that there was no good in fighting them; so that when other tribes wished us to fight them we refused. Our leading chiefs saw that to help the white men fight their enemies and ours would make them our friends,” explained Plenty Coups in the Crows’ decision to remain friendly with the whites. He went on to say, “we had always fought the three tribes, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe, anyway, and might as well do so now. The complete destruction of our old enemies would please us.”<sup>235</sup> It was quite apparent the leaders of the Crow had farsightedness in regards to the future of the white man in Crow country. They understood that to fight the whites would only lead to self destruction, but more importantly to drive out their old foes would ensure a peaceful future for the Crow people.

The old Chief went on to explain how the decision was the only logical course of action, stating, “Our decision was reached, not because we loved the white man who was already crowding other tribes into our country, or because we hated the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, but because we plainly saw that this course was the only one which might

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<sup>235</sup> Linderman, *Plenty Coups*, 154.

save our beautiful country for us. When I think back my heart sings because we acted as we did. It was the only way open to us,” explained the Chief.<sup>236</sup> The Crows kept this promise to stay friendly to the whites, until an incident in 1887, but other than that they remained peaceful toward the whites. This was in large part due to the social system that was in place within the Crow Nation, from the respect held for brothers, sisters, clan mothers and fathers and elders and parents. To go against the wishes of anyone of these people would show disrespect, not only for the individual going against these wishes, but for that individual’s family.

Also, agent Dexter Clap understood and utilized the culture of the Crow people. He had explained to the chiefs how members of families who had been killed by their old enemies wanted revenge for their dead relatives, and in the Crow culture this was a very serious matter. Although Clap probably tried to stop the Crows from retaliating prior to this time, he now pushed the Crows to enlist as scouts. He basically challenged the leaders, as well as the warriors to take action, which in this case was more for his own advancement. He probably felt if he could get the Crows to enlist, he would gain favor from officials higher up in the government. In any case, his speech about avenging the dead also pushed the Crows to serve as scouts as well.

Eventually, Gibbon was able to recruit twenty-three scouts to accompany his command and they set out on April 10<sup>th</sup> moving down the Yellowstone. Men such as Curley, White Swan, Half-Yellow Face and Goes Ahead to name a few were now serving as scouts. By June, Gibbon’s command had reached General Terry’s column coming out of Fort Abraham Lincoln in Dakota Territory. At this point a Sioux trail was discovered and Custer and the Seventh Cavalry, along with six Crow scouts, began to follow the trail

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<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Sioux. By the dawn of June 25<sup>th</sup>, the Sioux camp had been discovered by the Crow scouts from atop a peak in the Wolf Mountains called the Crows Nest.<sup>237</sup> Prior to this time Custer had never dealt with the Crows, but he was clearly impressed with them. He wrote back to his wife Libby stating, “I now have some Crow scouts with me, as they are familiar with the Country. They are magnificent looking men, so much handsomer and more Indian-like than any we have ever seen, and so jolly and sportive; nothing of the gloomy, silent Red men about them. They have formally given themselves to me, after their usual talk. In their speech, they said they had heard that I never abandoned a trail, that when my food gave out, I ate mule. That was the kind of man they wanted to fight under, they were willing to eat mule too!”

In the events that followed the discovery of the Sioux Camp, many decisions were made in haste by Custer, which directly affected the Crows and their duties as scouts. Fearful the Sioux would scatter in all directions if the Indians saw the cavalry, Custer decided to attack the camp rather than wait for reinforcement.<sup>238</sup> Shortly thereafter, Custer was convinced his camp had been spotted and gave the order to advance to the Indian village.<sup>239</sup> Unfortunately, Custer began to divide his men, sending Benteen and several companies south to the head of the south fork of what is now Reno Creek. He feared the Indians would run south and Benteen could head them off. He and the rest of the Seventh proceeded down the valley until they came upon a lone tipi. The tipi was erected by family members from the Indian village for the purpose of mourning the death

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<sup>237</sup> Harcey and Croone, *White Man Runs Him*, 96-97.

<sup>238</sup> Charles A. Varnum, *Custer's Chief of Scouts*, ed. John M. Carroll (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 86-88.

<sup>239</sup> Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 237-238.

of a family member, and when the family noticed the soldiers approaching, they immediately ran back to the camp five miles down the valley.<sup>240</sup>

Major Marcus Reno and a detachment of men were ordered to give chase, which was another mistake made by Custer. Not knowing the sheer numbers of Indians in the camp he had split his command into three divisions, greatly reducing his fire power as he neared the valley. The Crow Scouts had told Custer of the magnitude of the camp according to the number of horses on the bench land west of the village, but Custer ignored these warnings.

Curley, a young Crow warrior, gave Walter Camp one of the most accurate accounts of the events that unfolded as he accompanied Custer and his detachment to the north end of the village. He explained that as they headed north in the direction of Medicine Tail Coulee, the Crow scouts divided up. White Swan and Half Yellow Face were ordered by Custer to scout in advance of his command, but instead they joined Reno's command. They remained with him until after the battle. Curley and the other three scouts, along with scout Mitch Boyer, moved along the ridge overlooking the Little Big Horn Valley. Custer and his command continued to remain east of the ridge that Curley and the other scouts were on. Eventually, Custer and his men made it into Medicine Tail Coulee by way of Cedar Coulee and headed toward the Little Big Horn River. Curley and Boyer spotted them from the ridge and rode down toward them. White-Man-Runs-Him, Goes Ahead, and Hairy Moccasin doubled back along the ridge.

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<sup>240</sup> Walter M. Camp *Custer in 76: Walter Camp's Notes*, Kenneth Hammer ed. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 161.

“This was the last I saw of them,” Curley said of the three Crow Scouts, “until some weeks after the battle.”<sup>241</sup>

Curley and Boyer caught up with Custer as they neared the river. After joining them Curley said they moved down to the river to where some of the soldiers tried to cross. They were forced back by the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, who fired at them from across the river. After this unsuccessful attempt, they retreated up the north ridge into the vicinity of Calhoun Ridge. As they retreated, hundreds of warriors began to attack them from the rear and the flanks, “going up, the Sioux on all sides except the front,” said Curley. They managed to make it to the top of the ridge, but he was uncertain if any of the soldiers were killed. He remembered that the gunfire was very heavy as they ran up the ridge. “I do not know whether or not any one was killed on the way to the ridge but the firing was so heavy that I do not see how the command made the ridge without some loss,” he explained to Walter Camp. Once on top of the ridge the battle intensified, with warriors coming from every direction. “After we made the ridge just west of where Calhoun’s marker is placed, we were twice ordered to load and fire together. It occurred to me at the time that this must be some signal.”<sup>242</sup> Curley watched as the soldiers tried to hold off the advancing Sioux.

Curley later told Camp that the soldiers began to position themselves along the ridge (Calhoun Hill). Some of the men, he observed, were moving toward the north end of battle ridge (probably Custer). The battle intensified as warriors began to stream in from every direction, he remembered. He saw a group of men charging the Indians, but they were cut off and a good many of them killed. The rest began to run toward the

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<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*.

direction of last stand hill, on the west side of battle ridge. However, they were soon forced to move to the east side as warriors moved up the ravine from the direction of the river. When asked to describe the battle, he clapped his hands repeatedly and said, “heap shoot, shoot shoot.”<sup>243</sup> Evidently, it was at this point that Boyer told Curley that Captain Tom Custer warned the Crow scouts to save themselves. Curley insisted that Boyer go with him, but Boyer claimed that he was injured too badly.<sup>244</sup> Mitch Boyer was correct in his assumption that he was injured too badly, as he too died with Custer’s men. Curley said, “I saw Mitch talking with the general, [He was probably referring to Captain Tom Custer] Mitch said that Custer told him the command would very likely all be wiped out and he [Tom Custer] wanted the scouts to get out if they could. “I was riding my own horse. I found a dead Sioux and exchanged my Winchester for his Sharps rifle and belt of cartridges. On my saddle I had a coat made of a blanket with holes cut out for arms, and a hood over my head. In this fashion I rode out.” Curley claimed that he rode east, crossing the divide into the Rosebud Valley. Then he traveled south in the direction of where they had left Terry and Gibbon.<sup>245</sup>

Traveling for three days, Curley came upon the steamer Far West, which was at the mouth of the Little Big Horn River as it was delivering supplies to Gibbon and Terry’s commands.<sup>246</sup> He eventually found the steamer and delivered the news of Custer’s defeat to the world. As a young seventeen-year-old warrior he did not comprehend his role in the battle, but more importantly, how he would become the most

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<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> Camp, 167-168.

<sup>245</sup> A good overview of the Battle of the Little Bighorn see Robert M. Utley, *The Little Big Horn Battlefield: A History and Guide to the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Washington D. C.: Division of Publications National Park Service, 1994).

<sup>246</sup> Edgar I. Stewart, *Custer’s Luck* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 249-250, 293-294, 479-480. Gray, *Custer’s Last Campaign*, 375-379.



famous scout to emerge from the battle. Until his dying days, he continued to reject the notion that he was a hero, and he continued to downplay his role in the battle. However, the media took and inflated his story to make it appear that he was loyal to Custer and tried to save him. Eventually, he was pitted against White-Man-Runs-Him as to who was the most famous scout and the media continued to report that the two were feuding. However, according to Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow, who is the grandson of White-Man-Runs-Him, he explained that he and George Old Elk, Curley's grandson were very good friends. "I used to go with Curley and George all the time, they would come after me with their wagon and I stayed with them for a few days," explained Dr. Medicine Crow.<sup>247</sup>

In examining Crow social-familial kinship, animosities such as the one reported between the two likely never existed, except in the media. Either by blood, Clan, or band they were likely related to one another, or their spouses might have been related. Holding a grudge like this between the two would have been disrespectful to the Crow system, so it was likely that they held no animosities toward one another, as is clearly indicated by Dr. Medicine Crow.

More importantly, the Crow, in deciding to ally themselves with the whites during the Battle of the Little Big Horn, resulted in a unique relationship between the Crows and the U.S. Government. The Crows continued to serve as scouts for the army well into the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>248</sup> Fort Custer, a fort erected about 12 miles south of Crow Agency on the Banks of the Big Horn River served as a place where Crows and white soldiers openly interacted. Many of the Crow scouts were clearly comfortable at

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<sup>247</sup> Medicine Crow Interview, 2001.

<sup>248</sup> A record of "Fort Custer Enlistments," can be found in the Curley File, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Mt.

the fort, and the soldiers at the fort were evidently at ease with the Crows being at the fort.<sup>249</sup> More importantly, the years immediately following the battle were considerably more peaceful for the Crow people. There were occasional raids from surrounding tribes, especially the Piegan, a band of the Blackfeet nation, but the Crows had the clear advantage, especially in horses and arms. For example, in November of 1882, a horse raiding party entered the Crow reservation and took some horses. The official report reads, “November, 8 1882. The detachment pursued a party of hostile Indians (Piegans) and overtook them near Tullock’s fork, M.T., about 20 miles East from this Post [Fort Custer], and recaptured the stock stolen from them. One enlisted Indian Scout (Crooked Face) was wounded in the skirmish, Two Piegans reported Killed.”<sup>250</sup> However, engagements such as this were few, allowing the Crow people to adjust to life on a reservation.

Their role in the battle had unintentionally allowed the Crows to continue to practice much of their customs and beliefs. Also, because there was relative peace for the Crows, they continued to live like they always had, and moved freely around the reservation without much interference from the army. It is likely that surrounding tribes that engaged the U.S. government were under a watchful eye, and it is hard to speculate how much of their customs and traditions they had lost. As for the Crows, they maintained much of their social, religious and traditional customs, such as their language, and kept them intact well into the twentieth century. Although they were confined to a reservation, the Crows were allowed to remain Crows up until 1887 when the unique relationship between the Crows and whites was damaged.

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<sup>249</sup> LeForge, *Memoirs*, 281-282.

<sup>250</sup> Curley File, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Archives, Crow Agency Mt.

## CHAPTER VII SOCIAL KINSHIP

In 1887, Wraps-His-Tail's attempt to preserve what he saw as a dying Crow existence had failed. Having little faith in Crow leaders, he led his few followers in an armed rebellion against the Indian agent, but more importantly a resistance against the transition from buffalo culture to the reservation era. However, once he and his followers were subdued, the U.S. government found justifiable cause to force the remaining friendly Crows to live like the white man. The assimilation process had begun, eventually resulting in changes that affected religion, warfare and economics and life ways of the Crow. However, one aspect the government could not eliminate was the social familial kinship system that continued to remain strong throughout the turbulent transition during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's. While surrounding tribes lost much of their culture at an alarming rate the Crows were able to maintain this important aspect of their culture. Instead of resisting change, the Crow nation embraced it as they always had, taking the good qualities of Anglo society and intertwining Crow culture with this to maintain a unique system existing before the arrival of Euro-Americans.

By utilizing different arenas, the Crow maintained a strong kinship system, helping them to preserve not only their family ties, but also their language. In her book, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncos*, Allison Fuss Mellis believes the horse was a significant factor in preserving Crow culture. She explained how once the old way of life disappeared, tribes began to look for other ways to maintain their identities. She argued the horse was the answer, and tribes like the Crow utilized the animal to maintain their culture. Mellis explains how the Crows transformed the first industrial Crow Fair, which

was intended to promote farming and ranching, into a form of a celebration of a past culture. In examining Crow culture, kinship and language remained strong, but the horse alone cannot be credited with this continuation of Crow culture, but rather the event the animal helped create, which was the Crow Fair celebration. Today the fair is a large gathering of Crow people held every third weekend in August in Crow Agency, Montana. Some have called Crow Fair an example of how Crows have withstood assimilation. “Montana’s Indians, to a degree survived the devastation of their homelands and are a prominent part of this piece of the Big Sky Country.”<sup>251</sup>

The fair and what it entails remains a focal point of Crow society throughout the year as tribal members continuously prepare for this week-long event. The celebration not only includes horse racing, rodeo, a parade, dancing and other events, but also includes aspects that help maintain Crow culture. Started in 1904 by Indian Agent S. G. Reynolds, the fair was intended to showcase Crow farmers’ harvested goods. The Crow farmers were to compete with one another, while exchanging ideas on farming and creating a network in which farmers would help one another. This idea was based on the fairs of neighboring Anglo farming societies, and was intended to promote farming and ranching, or what Reynolds believed was the future of the Crow people.<sup>252</sup> However, once the fair began, it took on a life of its own evolving into a complex celebration embracing different aspects of Crow and Anglo society to create an arena that helped to maintain the language and culture of the Crow for one week out of the year.

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<sup>251</sup> Rick and Susie Graetz, *This is Montana: A Geography –Geographic history of Montana, Volume 1* (Northern Rockies Publishing: Helena, MT, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>252</sup> Allison Fuss Mellis, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncos: Rodeo and Native Traditions in the Northern Great Plains* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 2003), p. 19; see also George Bird Grinnell, *The Indians of To-Day* (New York: Duffield and Company, 1911), 176-177.

Presently, the celebration includes an all Indian rodeo, horse racing, parade and competitive pow-wow dancing, with dancers coming from all over the United States and Canada. In preparation for Crow Fair tribal members prepare by beading and compiling items for give-away to clan mothers and fathers. The fair is also a time when in-laws such as sons, daughters, brothers and sisters are given gifts. A giveaway by a family is usually held in private ceremonies, but the more ambitious members sponsor the event during the pow-wow or parade. A family will select an individual who has the right to speak publicly for a family to conduct the ceremony known as a giveaway.<sup>253</sup> The giveaways are a major part of the celebration as it respectfully displays the love a family has for an in-law, but more importantly to welcome him or her into the family. Along with the giveaways, each morning at sunrise, a camp crier goes throughout the camp making announcements specifically to the Crow members to get prepared for the day. The camp crier tradition has been passed down for generations and generations, with the person earning the right to hold this position, which helps to maintain strong culture and tradition for the Crow.<sup>254</sup>

The most important aspect of the celebration happens at the end of the celebration when officers are elected to administer the following year's celebration. During this time, the social and kinship systems become increasingly significant as candidates go amongst family members for support, both in votes and social support. Candidates utilize immediate family, in-law relationship and clan affiliations are utilized in an attempt to

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<sup>253</sup> A give-away includes such items as blankets, cloth for beading purposes, horses, guns, and tobacco. In recent years, a son-in-laws were given clothing items such as boots and western attire. See Fred Voget, "The Crow Indian Give-Away, a Primary instrument for Cultural Adaption and Persistence." *Anthropos* 82:1987.

<sup>254</sup> The Camp Crier is responsible solely for news pertaining to the Crow people and these announcements are done in the Crow Language. See Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 6.

win offices.<sup>255</sup> This type of campaigning was perfected after 1948, when the Crows began electing officers to serve as councilmen for the tribe. Close relatives along with distant ones are approached, as are in-laws and clan brothers and sisters as well as mothers and fathers of one's clan. Eventually, the stage was set for the following Crow Fair, and while the celebration concluded, preparations were already underway for next year, as the Crow sub-consciously planned for the gathering of tepee poles, beading outfits, and accumulating goods for events in which give-away ceremonies were to be conducted. One outsider referred to the celebration as a Crow event, stating, "Then there is Crow Fair, one of the great celebrations in Montana with roots back to 1904. Although it draws many visitors from literally around the world, it is not a staged tourist event, but rather a most colorful and exciting homecoming and gathering for the Crow people."<sup>256</sup>

Other arenas exist that have aided in the continuation of the social-kinship system, such as the Sweat Lodge, Sundance, and the Tobacco Society to name a few. However, none has the enormous effect that Crow Fair has in maintaining the continuance of this system, and each year since 1904, the Crow people have continued to reassert their identity by this celebration. The Social-Kinship system that has emerged because of Crow Fair and the other arenas today is a modified version of the previous Social-Kinship system that existed prior to the arrival of whites in Crow country. Crows have maintained this unique system through intense inter-tribal warfare, the reservation era, assimilation and modern American society. Although appearing complex, this system is quite simple in its purist form and can be understood by anyone, but to really understand

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<sup>255</sup> The social support refers to the time when a candidate is first running for one of the officer positions. Family members begin campaigning for this person, and if elected give support financially by donating items for the give-away celebration.

<sup>256</sup> Graetz, *This is Montana*, p. 17.

this system, one must live it. In the following paragraphs, the basic system of Family and Kinship are presented to give Crows and Non-Crows alike a basic understanding of the Crow Social-Kinship systems.

# Chapter VI

## Critical Events of the Late Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century the Crow Nation underwent a multitude of changes. The most obvious were of course going from nomadic hunters and gatherers, to living within the confines of a reservation, and being forced to accept Christian beliefs, learning English and educating young Crow children in the white man's way. However, one aspect of the Crow culture they retained throughout much of the intense period of change was the social-familial and kinship culture, which is the foundation for much of the Crow beliefs. These social-familial beliefs utilized by the Crow people were in place prior to the arrival of Europeans and remain strong, even today. It was because of several events during the twentieth century that the Crows retained much of the social-familial kinship beliefs and practices, but almost disappeared when a young Crow warrior led a group of warriors against the U.S. Army in 1887.

Following the Battle of the Little Big Horn, the Crow flourished as a nation, in large part because of their role as scouts. The soldiers and government officials did not see them as a threat, but rather welcomed them around a fort that was erected and named for Custer near present day Hardin, Montana. The scouts were also comfortable being near the soldiers, but more importantly the soldiers continued to utilize the natural skills of the Crow scouts. The scouts were allowed to go hunting whenever they wanted, which was beneficial for the army as well. In this manner, explained LeForge, "their



observations would be useful, equivalent to what they might be if they were continually scouring the country under the exact direction of somebody.”<sup>257</sup> Sometimes they hunted together forming a bond that brought the two races closer together.

The Crow scouts and their families also conducted their celebrations, and adoption ceremonies near the fort. To them, explained LeForge, this was home. The scouts and their families were soon finding themselves on first name basis with the soldiers in the fort. They would chat in the mornings while watering their horses for long periods of time.<sup>258</sup> This interaction afforded most of the Crows the ability to continue to practice their traditional ways. They conducted ceremonies as usual, such as the Sundance, Sweat lodge, and Tobacco Ceremonies. More importantly, because they were in a state of relative peace with the surrounding tribes, they continued to practice their Social and Familial kinship systems, including the Clan systems, and the In-law systems. However, not all the members of the Crow were happy with the situation they found themselves in. Some members wanted to continue to hunt in lands where they grew up hunting, but the problem was that these hunting grounds were now outside the reservation.

Leaving the reservation, regardless of whether the hunters were Sioux, Crow or Cheyenne, was dangerous because they were being shot at by an increasing number of white settlers moving near the Crow reservation. Unfortunately, this small group of discontented warriors learned quickly that leaving the reservation could be dangerous, sometimes fatal. Even the non-Indians who looked and dressed like Indians were subject to abuse by the newly arrived white settlers. In one incident, the scout LeForge and Red

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<sup>257</sup> LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 281-282.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

Wing, a Crow warrior met some emigrants on the Bozeman Trail. They were immediately taken as prisoners by the whites, and on several occasions almost killed, because they were thought to be hostile Indians.<sup>259</sup>

However, deaths at the hands of the emigrants did occur as the white settlers began to shoot Indians that were off the reservation. On one occasion in 1881, a Crow hunting party had left the reservation to hunt antelope. The hunting party split into three groups to cover more ground. One party encountered two cowboys who accused them of stealing horses. The argument escalated, resulting in the shooting and killing of one of the Crows. They hid his body in some underbrush, and left, apparently never being prosecuted for the murder. The agent for the Crows reported that all white men in the surrounding area had “banded together,” and declared they would “kill any Indian on sight found in the country.” The agent added, “No respect was paid to Indians in the area. It is deemed no crime to kill an Indian but rather an act of heroism.”<sup>260</sup> With this type of attitude toward the Indians, especially the Crow, they felt like prisoners in lands they once controlled. Furthermore, it began to create a division amongst the tribe, with the majority wanting peace, while a handful wanted to make war on the whites.

The Crows had unknowingly helped to secure the northern plains for white settlement, and as a result the Crows had lost considerable land because of the increase of whites in Crow country. They began realizing that the defeat of their enemies had not brought prosperity to the tribe, but instead it had opened the floodgates of white emigration, destroying the land and the buffalo.<sup>261</sup> Once the Sioux were forced out of

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<sup>259</sup> LeForge, 290-294

<sup>260</sup> Hoxie, Frederick E., *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America 1805-1935* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 111.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

Montana and the railroads were built, a mass of white ranchers began moving into prime grazing lands located near the borders of the Crow reservation. Many of the newly arrived ranchers felt the Crows were not utilizing the land, and began demanding the federal government place the Indians on a smaller reservation opening the surplus lands for white ranchers. The most vocal of these people was actually a leading rancher named Granville Stuart, who was married to an Indian woman. He wanted the Indian lands to be allotted, with the surplus being sold to non-Indians. He believed that segregating the Indians did not help them, and if they were sandwiched between whites, they would learn by example.<sup>262</sup> However, the underlying intention of Stuart and his group was to gain the surplus lands if the reservation lands were allotted, so in actuality, it appeared he had no intention of helping the Crows to succeed.

Henry Armstrong, agent for the Crows during this time shared Stuart's sentiments. He declared to his superiors in Washington D. C. that the Crows were under his control and now was the time to place them on the best portion of their reservation and open the rest to whites. He asked fellow officers at Fort Custer if lands east of the fort were, "far superior to the country around the agency?" Apparently the officers at Fort Custer felt it was. Immediately Armstrong began devising a strategy to remove the Crows and their agency east, near Fort Custer. This fort was built in response to the defeat of Custer and the Seventh Cavalry at the Little Big Horn.<sup>263</sup> He wrote to his superiors in Washington, "having watched other Indian tribes during the first twenty

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<sup>262</sup> Peter Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys: Native People and Cattle Ranching in the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 47-48.

<sup>263</sup> The United States Army built a fort in 1877, at the confluence of the Little Bighorn, and the bighorn Rivers, naming it Fort Custer. Lieutenant-General Phil Sheridan and Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, in their reports to the Secretary of war in 1875, stressed the need for at least two forts in the area. Richard Upton, *Fort Custer on the Big Horn 1877-1898; its pictures and personalities as told by its contemporaries* (California: A. H. Clark Company, 1973), 16.

years of my life I feel that the first, greatest and most important question affecting the Crows today is to locate them permanently on the best portion of their country...and then settle the whites around them closely and quickly as possible.”<sup>264</sup> It was evident that Armstrong felt he was doing the Crows justice by moving them out of the way of the great white migration. He stated at the end of his letter that taking this step was essential, if not they [Crows]] would “become extinct.” He sent his request to Washington in 1882, and by 1884 he had received permission to remove the Crows to their present agency.<sup>265</sup>

In reality, the forced move to the new agency was the start of the Crow reservation being reduced considerably from what it originally was. The approval to remove the Crows forced 3000 members to walk over two hundred miles to the southeast corner of their former reservation. Many of the Chiefs did not agree with the move but they knew in order to preserve what land they still had, they had to abide by the government’s demands.<sup>266</sup> It was this type of mistreatment of the Crows by the whites that resulted in a few Crow warriors becoming disgruntled with the situation they had been placed in. They witnessed many of their heroes reduced to begging for hand outs during ration days, and living like the white man. Moreover, these young discontented warriors would never really have a chance to achieve status within the tribe as warfare was now reduced to a few retaliatory raids. However, with the news of an Indian prophet coming to remove the whites from the face of the earth, many impressionable young men soon believed this to be true and began to believe this rumor and how this prophet’s medicine would save the Indians.

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<sup>264</sup> Hoxie, *Parading through History*, 17-18.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> Interview, Arthur Big Man, 1992.

“The greatest obstacle in the way of civilizing these Indians is the “medicine man,” who works upon their superstition.”<sup>267</sup> These were the words used by Special Agent Walter Shirlaw to describe the Crow Indians in 1890, in the eleventh U.S. census report. It is safe to assume that Shirlaw was referring to the young Crow warrior named Wraps-His-Tail, also known as Sword Bearer who led a band of young warrior against a contingency of U.S. Soldiers in 1887.<sup>268</sup> He became the outspoken leader of the discontented small group of warriors who wanted to live as they had before the arrival of the whites. Also, he too was caught up in the frenzy of Wovoka, the Paiute prophet that was supposed to bring back the days of the buffalo. During the 1880s Wraps-His-Tail became increasingly belligerent toward the whites, especially the Indian agent.

Upon returning from a successful horse raiding party, Wraps-His-Tail, led his party through the streets of Crow Agency to show the people of his success. He and his men had staged a counter-raid against the hated Piegan (Blackfeet) who had initiated the horse stealing. Wraps-His-Tail, and his men donned their finest regalia as they paraded down the streets firing off their guns and yelling their deeds in a display of their valor. The young warrior made his way to the agent’s house. Henry E. Williamson was standing outside watching the return of the warriors when all of a sudden; Wraps-His-Tail rode directly toward the agent and fired a shot over his head. Meanwhile, the Indian agent Henry E. Williamson watched as Wraps-His-Tail wheeled his horse around and calmly rode off to resume the celebration.

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<sup>267</sup> Eleventh Census, 1890. 361

<sup>268</sup> The Name Sword bearer was obtained by Wraps-up-His-Horses-Tail shortly before the battle occurred on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1887. He may have received a vision in which he obtained the name Sword Bearer, but it Crow oral history suggests he got the name after he participated in a Sundance with the Cheyenne and they presented him with a saber. Several Elders also believe he had participated in a Sundance; Arthur Big Man, 1992. George Brown, 2006; Samuel Plainfeather, 2004.

After regaining his composure, Williamson ordered the tribal police officers to arrest Wraps-His-Tail and his men for the theft of the horses, as well as sending a request to Fort Custer, 14 miles to the north, for military reinforcement. Within weeks, a large force of U.S. troops were gathered at the agency where on November 4, 1887 they engaged Wraps-His-Tail, and several of his men, resulting in the only time Crows ever took up arms against the United States Government. Although this incident had no major impact on American history, unlike that of the battle of the Little Big Horn, it impacted Crow-white relations greatly.

Wraps-His-Tail was unique in several ways. First of all he was the only Crow to ever break the 1825 friendship treaty, and he was the only Crow to engage in war with the whites. Also, he represented the new class of Crow warriors, one that fought the abuses of corrupt agents, and corrupt ranchers. He was part of a generation that endured the most changes of any generation before, or since. They witnessed a complete annihilation of the buffalo, as well as the disappearance of a whole way of life. Although there were many Crows who were discontent with reservation life, not many people did anything to correct it at that time. However, this young warrior gave his life to fight for what he believed in, and in today's Crow circles, many consider him to be a hero, rather than a villain. He opened the door for other great leaders such as Curley, Plenty Coups, and White-Man-Runs-Him to imitate him, but they fought instead in the white man's legal courts, rather than the battlefield. The intent of this chapter is to examine why this battle occurred, and show that Wraps-His-Tail was justified in his actions that day in November of 1887, and more importantly to demonstrate how the Crows were able to maintain much of their culture.

The Battle of the Little Big Horn was a turning point for the Crow, as they were involved in one of the last great battles between the Indians and the U.S. government. The Crows were recruited to serve as scouts during this conflict, mainly because they were long time enemies of the Sioux and Cheyenne. More importantly, the hostile bands were moving into Crow country, which had to be stopped. The smallpox epidemic, warfare and other factors greatly reduced the number of Crows, so they were forced to rely on the army for an alliance to rid their enemies of Crow land. Wraps-His-Tail, only a young boy at this time, was probably quite aware of the situation and watched as warrior after warrior joined the army to fight the Sioux.

The campaign reached its height on June 25, 1876 when Lt Colonel George Armstrong Custer led the Seventh Cavalry into the Valley of the Little Big Horn. Crow scouts had located the camp, but had informed Custer that the camp was too numerous for the Seventh to handle alone. Without regard for the advice Custer led his men down Medicine Tail Coulee where he and several hundred of his men met their deaths, and the United States army suffered the embarrassment of defeat from a supposedly primitive tribe. However, the next year campaigns were launched against the Sioux, with the use of Crow auxiliaries, and made easy work of the hated enemy. Many of the scouts returned to great ceremonies in their honor, and many such as Curley, White-Man-Runs-Him, and Plenty Coups gained great honors during this time. Wraps-His-Tail and other young boys at the time were sure to have witnessed the events and longed to one day enjoy the same kind of successes as these men had.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> For the best overall account of the Battle of the Little Big Horn see, Robert M. Utley, *Park Service handbook*.

However, life for the Crows changed significantly in 1884, once they were relocated onto the reservation they now occupy. What occurred as a result of this move was the fact that the Crows could no longer leave the reservation without permission from the Indian agent. The once free buffalo hunting peoples were forced to convert to an Anglo life style. They were forced to move on to small parcels of land, forced to farm instead of hunt and more importantly they were being forced to convert to Christianity. This was the main intention of Armstrong, who wanted to move the Crows onto a more manageable piece of their reservation, allow religious groups to come onto the reservation to convert the Indians, and make them good Christian Farmers.<sup>270</sup> The real reasoning behind the move was to open up land for the great number of Euro-Americans moving into Montana. The Northern Pacific railroad was recently completed, bringing into the newly established city of Billings thousands of whites, who had aspirations of making it big in the west.<sup>271</sup> However, it is highly likely that many of the newcomers had a preconceived notion about Indians, especially ones who had read the dime novels and others who had read about the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Custer's defeat was still fresh in the minds of many Americans, most of whom had heard about the battle and the events that led up to it. Although the Crow had served as auxiliaries, they were bunched in the public mind with the Sioux and Cheyenne who defeated the Seventh Cavalry in 1876.

Once relocated, Wraps-His-Tail probably witnessed many of the changes, and was likely confused by the events. Many of the Crows began moving into small wooden houses, and soon began farming. The motivation of converting the Indians was evident

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<sup>270</sup> Hoxie, *Parading Through History*. 17-18.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*



in Armstrong's report, "My aim is to advance the Indian as rapidly as possible – not allow him time to look back with more or less regret to other days – but to keep him ever interested in the new life; to provide him in the shortest practical time with all the implements necessary for successful effort in whatever work the agent may deem it proper to direct him."<sup>272</sup> Although the interest of the agent was in converting the Indians to Christians, he had no confidence in the Indians accomplishing this task on their own.

Cattle, another measure of so called civilization was forced upon Wraps-His-Tail and his people. They were being purchased by the agent using the Crows' money, and many of the cattle were kept in common herds. There were white farmers and ranchers that were entrusted with the care of the land and the animals, except during roundups and branding, where the Crow men were used for herding and labor. "The Indians are not allowed to have anything to do with the cattle except on the occasions of our regular spring and fall round-ups under the direction of the agency employees," wrote the Indian Agent.<sup>273</sup> However, this was the extent of the contact that the Crows had with their own livestock as was reported by Williamson, who wrote, "The stock so held will of course be under the supervision of the several district farmers."<sup>274</sup> This was more than likely very demoralizing for the Indians as they knew they were viewed as children, and it is probable that many, in Crow circles, that included Wraps-His-Tail, voiced their dissatisfaction.

What was becoming evident for the Crows was the intrusion of Christianity within the Crow reservation. For a tribe that held religion in such high regards many of

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<sup>272</sup> Report of Henry E. Williamson, September 15, 1886, in Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report*, 50<sup>th</sup> Congress, P. 174.

<sup>273</sup> Armstrong, *Annual Report*, 1885. P. 121.

<sup>274</sup> AR-COIA, 1886. P. 174.

the events that unfolded during this time were quite devastating, especially for the young men like Wraps-His-Tail who grew up depending on religion for their social advancement. The most devastating effect of Christianity on the Crows was the replacement of this new religion with the old. However, this was no easy task for the agent as he wrote, “I do not think there is any Crow Indian who feels that he needs to be saved. They think they are the chosen people. Any person coming here to engage in missionary work will meet with many discouragements.”<sup>275</sup> This instilled in the various Christian groups a sense of urgency to convert the Indians, especially the Catholics.

A young Jesuit Priest by the name of Father Peter Prando arrived in Crow Agency in the early the part of the 1880s to minister to the Crows. The Crows called him “Iron eyes” because of the fact that he wore spectacles.<sup>276</sup> The first order of business for Father Prando was to convert the Crows from traditional religion to Catholic Christianity. He ordered many of the elder Crows to discard their medicine bundles, which many did. It is likely that Wraps-His-Tail and other young men were aware of these actions and were probably displeased.<sup>277</sup> Next, children were taken to the Catholic boarding schools to be educated in the White Man’s way. It was reported that many children had already been taken to the boarding schools, many by force, and Crows were rather unhappy. “The Indians are unwilling to part with their children. This is the most serious complaint I have to make against the Crows,” wrote agent Armstrong in 1885.<sup>278</sup>

However, the biggest humiliation suffered by Wraps-His-Tail and his people was the continued raids by other tribes such as the Piegan. Many of the surrounding agents

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<sup>275</sup> AR-COIA, 1885. P.121.

<sup>276</sup> *The Indian Sentinel*, Volume II, Number 6, April 1921. P. 262.

<sup>277</sup> Prando, Personal Letters, 1887.

<sup>278</sup> COIA-AR, 1885. P. 121-122.

had reported that horse stealing raids were continually taking place, and that tribal police were not able to stop many of the young men from sneaking off. In 1885, the Blackfeet Indian agent wrote about horse stealing, “This favorite pastime, or rather business of Indians, is the cause of great trouble to the agent.”<sup>279</sup> The Crow agent in 1886 wrote, “The Crows have during the past year suffered severely from raids by the Piegan and Sioux Indians for the purposes of Horse Stealing.”<sup>280</sup> Most agents shared these sentiments, and many felt not enough measures were taken to ensure the safety of the Indians under their direction. Wraps-His-Tail and his people clearly suffered the losses of many fine horses to their lifelong enemies.

During this time as well, many of the Indians were beginning to notice less mobility out of the reservation, as instigated by the agents. Many other tribes who had relatives within the Crow were not allowed to come in and visit. The Crows were also not allowed to leave the reservation, and more importantly many were not allowed to return to the former way of life, although food was scarce. In February of 1887, the commissioner of Indian Affairs gave a directive that did not allow tribes to visit one another.<sup>281</sup> In one instance, Sitting Bull, the famed chief of Custer’s defeat, was turned away by soldiers as he tried to visit friends on the Crow reservation.<sup>282</sup> It was these types of incidents that probably infuriated Wraps-His-Tail and his people.

The final act that led to the so called Wraps-His-Tail uprising was the horse raids from Piegan, who had run off with many horses of the Crows. By this time the Crows were beginning to increase the quality of their stock by purchasing Stallions to cross with

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<sup>279</sup> COIA-AR, 1885. P. 118.

<sup>280</sup> COIA-AR, 1886. P. 177.

<sup>281</sup> COIA-AR, 1887.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

the already existing mares. The end result was an increase in size and strength of horses, which ultimately increased the value of the horses. Unfortunately, disease was also taking its toll on horses, "I am sorry to state that the disease so fatal to horse, 'glanders,' is present among the Indians horses on this reserve." The Indian agent reported, "The year thus far has been wholly free from raids, made for purposes of theft or murder, by neighboring Indians, and if we escape through the whole year it will indeed be anomalous." Although horse raiding was becoming less frequent, when it did occur it was devastating to the Crows.

By September of 1887, young Wraps-His-Tail had made a name for himself as a leader of successful horse raiding party, and of a warrior possessing powerful medicine. He had a small following of young discontented warriors who felt as he did, unhappy with reservation life. They too, witnessed the changes occurring around them, so when Wraps-His-Tail began leading raids, and counter raids to avenge the Crows, they quickly fell in with him. By mid September of 1887 it was becoming apparent that many of the Crows were unhappy with agent Williamson. Many had reported that he was a drunk, and was mean and often times unfair to the Crows, but for Wraps-His-Tail he would show the agent that he did not fear him or the Piegan raiders.<sup>283</sup>

Upon returning from a counter raid against the Piegan on September 30, Wraps-His-Tail rode directly to the agent and fired a shot over his head. Alarmed, the agent called for his arrest, while requesting troops from Fort Custer. By the next day over 100 soldiers were armed and ready for immediate action. However, the situation relaxed and the number of soldiers was reduced to a small force to watch government employees. Over the next several days the arrest of Wraps-His-Tail was ordered, and once again

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<sup>283</sup> Colin Calloway, *Sword Bearer and the Crow Outbreak*, 40.

soldiers returned, but this time en masse to show a great force that would scare the Indians into submission.<sup>284</sup>

It was evident that the army felt the Crows were no threat as a whole, but the excited Williamson had made false allegations against the young leader and his men, which resulted in a much larger force being sent to Crow Agency. Thomas E. Ruger, Brigadier General, who commanded the army in the Dakota Territory wrote, “It did not appear from information then had that the Crows, as a tribe, would break into active hostility, it remained a matter of conjecture, from information so far obtained.”<sup>285</sup>

However, the army did in fact send a large force to subdue Wraps-His-Tail and his men.

The local newspapers, such as the Billings Gazette began writing negatively about the whole affair. There were reports that 12,000 Sioux bucks could be assembled, along with a force of Cheyenne, which the paper claimed could kill every white in the territory. In one instance the Gazette reported, “The time for mawkish sentiment in these matters has gone by and the stern hand of the law should never relax its hold on these Indian until the whole Crow tribe have a wholesome respect for its mandates inculcated into their rebellious hearts.”<sup>286</sup> It was evident that the Gazette intended to argue for the opening of reservation lands, and this was the opportune time to make their case.

By November 5, it was clear that Wraps-His-Tail and his followers were not going to come in peacefully. The army had already assembled on a bluff near the Agency, and many of the Crows had come into the agency for protection against a counter-raid from the Piegan who Wraps-His-Tail and his men had taken horses from a month earlier. That afternoon Wraps-His-Tail rode defiantly through his ranks, often

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<sup>284</sup> Thomas H. Ruger, Annual Report, Secretary of War, 1888, 147.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>286</sup> *Daily Gazette*, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, October 8, 1887.

times making mock charges at the soldiers. However, it wasn't until he began leading his warriors in a different direction away from the army that a skirmish occurred. The army interpreted their movement as an escape and intercepted them. Shots were fired; it was a fast and furious small skirmish, which resulted in the death of several Crows and one soldier.<sup>287</sup>

By this time many of the young men with Wraps-His-Tail began to surrender, and many fled southward toward the Big Horn Mountains. For the young defiant leader, he rode his horse hard north of the agency where several of the tribal police had intercepted him. As he knelt down to take a drink of water from the Little Big Horn river, Fire Bear rode in and walked up to Wraps-His-Tail and fired one shot into the back of his head killing him instantly, it was reported by witnesses that he made the comment, "This is how you take care of troublemakers, and this was how it should have been handled in the first place. " Because of his actions, Fire Bear was forever ostracized from the tribe, and many of the Crows believed that he was kept as a tribal police officer in order to protect his life.

According to oral accounts of the incident as told by Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow, Wraps-His-Tail had great faith in his medicine powers. "He said, [Wraps-His-Tail] 'all I have to do is swing this magic sword and they'll be electrocuted, hit by lightning.' So he was determined to try that. Everybody tried to dissuade him. They said, 'Don't do that, don't do that. We've got along with the white people. Look what happens when Indians try to fight the government- Cheyenne, Lakota. Don't you do it!' But he was determined."<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> For a detailed account of the battle see Ruger, 1888.

<sup>288</sup> McCleary, *Ghosts on the Land*. 117-120.

“He only had about five or six young guys with him. And it just so happened that it was ration day, all the Districts were camped there for several days, waiting for their rations.” Dr. Medicine Crow continued, “the Fort Custer soldiers were already at Crow Agency on the west side of the bank, back of the catholic church, where the housings [residential areas] are at. There they got their lines all set up and several Hotchkiss guns. This Warps Up His tail decided to go right in front of the line that was forms already. So he rode in front. He only had one guy with him. The others kind of hesitated. So he rode in front of the military line. Went around there, came back again singing his war song and all that. So he went back again along the other line. He went farther into the line there and killed one soldier,” explained Medicine Crow.

“Then the cavalry chased them, chased them. Then Wraps Up His Tail gave the sword to the boy that was with him, Spotted Rabbit, he said, ‘Swing it, swing it!’ They were on the run so he swung it any direction. It didn’t work. ‘Run for your lives, it’s not working.’ So the two took off.”

“Wraps Up His Tail took off by himself. Indian police chased him and one of them caught up with him by the river. Wraps Up His Tail stopped to drink water. By that time this police, chief of police, Fire bear, caught up with him and said, ‘You so-and-so, could of got us in trouble, I’m going to kill you!’ Took his pistol out. ‘Hey, wait a minute brother, let me get a drink first brother.’ So he got off, got down there in the river

and was drinking. When he looked up Fire Bear said, “I’m not your brother,’ and shot him right between the eyes. This was his end there.”<sup>289</sup>

With the trouble over, many of the Crows returned to their allotments, and the army quickly disbanded, once again reducing their numbers significantly. Many of the participants were thus sent to various prisons, and several of the young men were sent to boarding schools such as Carlisle. The men spent up to two years in the prisons, and it seemed that all was quiet on the reservation.

In examining annual reports put forth by Indian agents and the U.S. Census Bureau before and after the Sword Bearer incident, we can conclude that the attitude toward the Crows had changed considerable. The report prior to the incident showed the Crows were making progress in becoming farmers and ranchers. There were instances where Crows were given much credit for being so advanced, especially as ranchers. “The owners, representing 183 heads of families, were much pleased to received these cattle in their personal charge, and as I had previously taken pains to ascertain that each Indian was so situated as to be able to take proper car of his little herd,, I have no doubt but that the action will prove a wise step and be of no little encouragement to the families receiving the stock.”<sup>290</sup>

On the other hand, the report submitted by the agent for the 1890 Census Bureau was quite different from his counterpart in 1887. The Sword Bearer incident was still fresh in the minds of non-Indians and it was evident that they lost confidence in the Crow. In referring to medicine men of the tribe the census taker wrote, “they have a

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>290</sup> COIA-AR, 1887, 135.



contempt for the agency physician and his medicine generally, with the exception of salves, which they use somewhat; but it is a difficult matter to prescribe for them, as no attention is paid to the doctor's direction." He goes on to say, "As a class these Indians are peaceful in disposition and inclined to a pastoral life; at the same time they are stealthy and sly."<sup>291</sup>

Examining the reports suggests a conclusion can be made of how the attitude of whites toward the Crows had changed in an unfavorable manner. Now the Crows were facing an era when they would begin to lose much of their freedom, and more importantly the loss of their old way of life. Many medicine bundle owners were forced to discard them and children were now being educated as white children, but without the benefits enjoyed by white children. Furthermore, religious ceremonies were now going underground, with some of the practices disappearing altogether, such as the Crow Sundance. Sword Bearer divided the tribe with his actions in 1887, but he also forced the Crows to open their eyes as they were beginning to lose their identity. In the early part of the twentieth century, the Crows began to reassert themselves as leaders within their communities and began to reinstate some of their traditional practices, such as the Sweat lodge and Tobacco ceremonies. One aspect of Crow culture that remained intact and was not altered was the Social Familial kinship system of the Crows.

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<sup>291</sup>Eleventh Census, 1890, 362.

## Chapter VII

### Crow Familial Systems

In his Master Thesis concerning European effects on Crow society Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow wrote, “There is no question but that both kin and clan affinities are extensive and inclusive and the result is mutual and wide affection throughout the whole tribe. Tribal unity and harmony is thus maintained.”<sup>292</sup> The clan system was the basis of Crow social organization and was equally important as blood relationships.<sup>293</sup> Today, it can be argued these systems had evolved to not only include kinship, but also government and politics. In 1939, Medicine Crow argued that the kinship and clan systems did not include the tribal government, but since 1948, when the Crow created their own constitution, clan and kinship have been important in politics, especially in determining tribal leadership. Because votes were critical in getting into office, candidates utilized every social connection available to them when trying to get into office. However, to outsiders, the systems used by the Crows can appear to be complex as well as confusing.

Much of the complexity and confusion is a result of translating into English to Crow or vice versa. Often, researchers and early explorers did little to understand these systems, or just simply ignored them. For example, historian Fred Hoxie, author of *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation* never went into any substantial detail about the kinship and clan systems of the Crow. In a footnote, Hoxie refers the reader back to the work of Robert Lowie, in his work on Crow Social systems.

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<sup>292</sup> Medicine Crow, Joseph “The Effects of European Culture Contacts upon the Economic, Social, and Religious Life of Crow Indians.” Thesis, University of So. Ca, 1939,. 25.

<sup>293</sup> Beaumont, Dennis *Sits in the middle*, M.A. thesis, 23.

Crow scholars such as Medicine Crow, Dennis Beaumont and Dale Old Horn have all placed a heavy emphasis on the Clan and kinship systems as being critical in Crow history, often playing a critical part in the development of the Crow nation. However, because it is quite confusing to many who do not speak the language, it can prove to be difficult to understand. Furthermore, early researchers often presented these systems in such a way that it confused Crows and non-Crows alike.

As a result, information about the systems can be difficult to find, and when found, attempting to correctly interpret them can become difficult. Much of the confusion is the result of early writings in which terminology used to identify certain aspects were often confusing. For example, Henry Lewis Morgan, an anthropologist in the early nineteenth century observed how “A man cannot marry in his own tribe [clan]. This law is still strictly preserved. All the members of the tribe are blood kindred and cannot intermarry.”<sup>294</sup> The fact Morgan used tribe to identify clan may have caused researchers to confuse clans with the actual tribe. As a result, the Crow clan system may not have been valid in the eyes of Euro-Americans until further research was conducted on the tribe by people such as Robert Lowie and John Collier.<sup>295</sup> Also, because the clan system was so critical among the Crow, researchers often misinterpreted the family system because clan and blood family were equally utilized and significant for the Crow.

For example, Lowie asked a young boy “where is your daughter?” The young boy pointed toward his first cousin and gesturing that she was his daughter. The girl was the daughter of the boy’s uncle, or her mother’s brother. In the Crow clan system,

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<sup>294</sup> Henry Lewis Morgan, *The Indian Journals*, ed. Leslie A. White, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 168.

<sup>295</sup> John Collier had done extensive research and interviews about the Social and Kinship systems in the 1920’s and 30’s. The documents can be found at the Newberry library, under the Collier collection.

everyone is a member of the mother's clan, while they are a child of the father's clan. As a result the first cousin, in the clan system was a daughter because the boy was a brother to his uncle, or her father, designating her as a child of her father's clan.<sup>296</sup> This relationship is quite common, but to an outsider it can be very confusing, especially because of the fact that regardless of age, every member of the tribe was a clan mother or father.

Fortunately, today much of the systems utilized by the Crow have been researched since Morgan's time. Although there is no single work that covers the social and familial system used by the Crow, enough information can be gathered to give an intimate look into the culture of the Crow. This chapter will give the reader an in-depth look into this system, which is the basis of Crow culture that exists today.

The earliest research done on the social systems was by anthropologist Robert Lowie, who observed, "The Crow illustrate a number of widespread principles. For one thing they exemplify the social significance of both sides of the family, irrespective of the rule of descent." He was informed by members of the tribe that Crows practiced a system in which the paternal and maternal sides of the family were equally important.<sup>297</sup> They served as important figures in the raising of children; also equally important was the clan system that existed within the tribe. Furthermore, although immediate family was important, it did not necessarily supersede the extended family.

Lowie had initially visited the Crow reservation in 1909 to research the military organizations of the Crow, but soon realized how significant the kinship and clan systems were. "In the course of these investigations considerable material accumulated on the

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<sup>296</sup> The children follow their mothers' clan, while they are the children of the father's clan. In this case the boy that Lowie was speaking to was a father in clan terms to his first cousin. Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 19.

<sup>297</sup> Lowie, *Social Customs*, p. 69.

clans and social customs of the Crow, and a very brief, fourth visit to the reservation in 1912 enabled me to fill in a number of gaps in my knowledge and to present a fairly systematic outline of the subject,” he wrote.<sup>298</sup> Often visitors to the Crow noticed the closeness of the people, especially how important the social bond between tribal members was emphasized. Francois Antoine Larocque, a French trader traveled with the Crows in the early part of the nineteenth century and witnessed this bond stating, “They have not that taciturnity common to the more Northern Nations; I have never seen them remain any time in their tents alone with their head between their Knees and not uttering a word; they are social are fond of company and are lonesome when alone.”<sup>299</sup> The major factor in this closeness between members was the kinship system, and the various roles each person had within this system.

Furthermore, in examining the way members conducted themselves publicly, valuable insight can be gained as to how extensive the kinship system was, and who it included. For example, Larocque observed how neighboring tribes of the Crows would enter a lodge of another person, and “keep down their head, or muffle it so in their Robe or Blanket that it can hardly be seen.” He continued, “These Indians[Crows] never do it, they ar(sic) bold & keep up their head in any place, and say that it is a sign of having bad designs when one is ashamed to show his face.”<sup>300</sup> The obvious reason for this boldness put forth by the Crows is simple, and can be directly related to the Kinship system. The Crows were often viewed as pompous and arrogant by others who encountered them. However, we can assume they announced their arrival in this way for several reasons. The main reason was for the simple fact that if they entered a lodge, and an in-law of any

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<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>299</sup> Larocque, *Observations on the Crow*, 208.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

sort was within the lodge, appropriate measures could be taken by the both the person entering as well as by the in-law.<sup>301</sup>

For example, a man could not be found in the same lodge as his Mother in-law, and could not speak to her under the social-kinship rules of the Crow. If this man announced his entrance into a lodge, it was not for show, but rather for respect to either his mother-in-law, or any in-law to give ample warning of his entrance.<sup>302</sup> However, this show of arrival was often viewed as arrogance to people unaware of the culture and family systems of the Crow.

An obvious difference between Euro-American and Crow social-familial systems is the language used by the two different cultures. Gender is also significant because a male member addresses certain relatives differently than a female addressing the same relative. It is imperative to understand that many words used by Euro-Americans to identify family members do not exist in the Crow Language. The basic framework of the family for Crows include Mother, Father, Brother, Sister, Grandmother, Grandfather and In-law. The Euro-American society recognizes the same members, but also includes cousins, aunts and uncles, great aunts, great uncles, nephew and niece. This system does not translate into the Crow language because there are no terms that exist to identify cousins, aunts or uncles, nephew or nieces.<sup>303</sup>

To further complicate the matter, over the years the Crow Language has undergone some significant changes as new words were created to identify items recently

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<sup>301</sup> It not only included in-laws, but also other members of the family so that they too could take appropriate measures if their in-laws entered.

<sup>302</sup> In Henry Lewis Morgan's journal, he discusses this relationship between the son-in-law and Mother-In-Law relationship. p. 169-170.

<sup>303</sup>The Crow dictionary contains the translated words of the various family members. See Helen Medicine Horse, *A Dictionary of Everyday Crow*, (Crow Agency, M.T.: Bilingual Materials Development Center, ND).

introduced by Euro-Americans. Many of these newly created words have undergone slight changes, but these slight changes have clearly changed the meaning of the words. For example, the word for wagon in the Crow Language is baapa`ttatchia, which literally translated is “The object/thing that rolls over and over.” This is in reference to the wagon wheels rolling along and the spokes turning over and over. However, in recent times the word for wagon has changed considerably, and now is pronounced baaptchi`a, which now translates to “The object/thing that carries,” and is rather incomplete, but accepted.

Also, in observing different generations of Crow speakers, each refers to the same item differently. An assumption can be made that many words that were recently introduced have undergone considerable change. For example, coffee was introduced to the Crows in the early part of the nineteenth century, possibly by fur trappers, but definitely by the U.S. government. The government included coffee in the rations that were promised in the treaties.<sup>304</sup> In modern times the word for coffee is Biilishpite`e. However, older people, let’s say older than sixty, refer to coffee as Biiliishpatee`, although close in spelling to the former word, now has a completely different meaning. The former word Billishpite`e when translated refers to coffee, but literally does not mean coffee, but has been shortened. The latter word, Billishpatee` when translated means Black Water. However, older generations referred to coffee very differently calling coffee, li Biilii` Shiippittua` which literally means, “how they make water black.” In examining the evolution of this word, a conclusion can be made of how many words in the Crow Language may have undergone the same change. Also, words were lost, or not used as much because they are easier and more common. For example, Onion, which is

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<sup>304</sup> Many of the Annual reports, especially in the 1860’s include coffee as rations.

pronounced Biittxu`a in the Crow language is not used as frequently, because the word onion is preferred.

Fortunately, after carefully examination of some words, the original meaning can be obtained. This can be said about Crow words referring to family, in which most words are still in use today, but have undergone some sort of modifications. Some references for family members have been shortened and have lost meaning, but a thorough translation can be made for these words. In the following paragraphs, a breakdown, and proper translation will be given to aid the reader to better understand crow social-kinship, and culture.

## **Blood-kin Relationship**

“Adults loved children generally, and the feeling was naturally intensified by close association irrespective of blood-kinship,” wrote Robert H. Lowie in observing Crow Kinship Systems. Furthermore, Lowie stated “the number of physiological offspring of a particular person in a lodge was neither easily discovered nor too closely investigated.”<sup>305</sup> He was referring to the fact children, regardless of blood, or clan were referred to as my children by parents. They refer to their children as “Balaaka,” or “my Children,” and include not only offspring, but extend to the children of siblings, depending upon the gender of the parents’ sibling.<sup>306</sup> In referencing their children, Crow parents apply the term “Balaaktahila,” or my children [offspring] and includes both male and female children. When referencing male children the parents, regardless of whether it is the mother or father refers to him as “balaakbachee,” and addresses him as “ilooshe.”

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<sup>305</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, p. 19.

<sup>306</sup> A male will refer to his brothers’ children as his children, and a mother will refer to her sisters’ children as her children.



The female child is referred to as “balaakbia” and is addressed as “xuuche.”<sup>307</sup> These terms are used by all the mothers and fathers of the child, both by blood relation and clan relation.<sup>308</sup>

The treatment of male children is quite different, with the majority of male offspring required to hunt and defend the camp. They aspire to reach the status of chief by completing feats verified by other warriors. As a result, “It is a high crime for a father or mother to inflict corporal punishment on their male children” observed Osborne Russell, who visited the Crows in the early part of the nineteenth century.<sup>309</sup> This was in large part due to the fact that males risked their lives on a daily basis before the reservation period defending and providing for the camp. It was likely males could die in battle because intertribal warfare dominated the lives of Indians on the Northern Plains during much of the nineteenth century.

The society as a whole was responsible for the special treatment of males because of the high death rate for the men, but to lose a child was devastating to parents, especially the mother. “A Crow mother as a matter of course lavishes upon her children all her loving-kindness, intercedes on their behalf, and grieves over them with extravagant manifestations of sorrow,” observed Lowie.<sup>310</sup> This was especially true for a mother mourning the loss of a son to warfare, “Traditionally, Spotted-rabbit’s mother ranks as the supreme mourner. When her son was killed she did not have him buried for a very long time, but carried his corpse about when the Indians moved, leaving it a little ways from the camp. Then she would once more gash her arms and head. When she

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<sup>307</sup> The terms used to address the children are gender specific and refer to the genitalia of the children see Robert Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 24.

<sup>308</sup> McCleary, *Old Horn*, p. 30-31.

<sup>309</sup> Russell, Osborne, p. 147.

<sup>310</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, p. 24

wailed throughout the camp, all the people cried”<sup>311</sup> However, this does not take anything away from the relationship between mother and child, regardless of sex.

The Crow refer to their mother as “Basahke`,” by both the male and female members of the tribe.<sup>312</sup> The basic foundation of any family begins with the mother, and when the word Basahke`, ie. Mother is broken down it is not as simple as saying mother. It is very likely this word, much like many other Crow words has been shortened and has lost the original meaning. After studying the meaning of the word a thorough breakdown can be made in the following manner: Basah, might have originally been translated as Balasa` or my heart. The second part of the modern word for mother was likely translated as aka`h, which means owner of. So if we combine the two words Balasa` Aka`h, we get “the one who owns my heart or the one that gave me life, and owns it.”<sup>313</sup> This makes a lot of sense; however, because it has likely been shortened it has lost some of its original meaning. In any case, the male and female members of the tribe refer to their mother the same way, and address them the same, which is ihka`a. The word ihka`a, refers to the stars in the sky, which are referred to as ihki`i and is not gender specific, but utilized by both sexes.

The word for father is gender specific with the males referring to the father as “Biilapxe,” while females use the word “Basa`ake.” Unfortunately, most scholars studying the Crow Family system ignored much of the female relationships with their fathers, except briefly, and not in any kind of detail. As for the male relationship, when translated, “Biilap,” can possibly be translated as the second-one, which is pronounced

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<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> Old Horn and McCleary, *The Social and Family Structure of the Apsaalooke*. 30.

<sup>313</sup> When I was teaching Crow Language at Little Big Horn College, I made literal translations of many Crow words, and consulted with other Crow Speakers, who came to similar conclusions as I had.

“Bii” or “Me,” and “duup” second and “apxe,” or “akhee.” So when put into one word, it can be pronounced as, “the second one that owns me, or my heart.” Also, the term father in the Crow language has a “far wider denotation than in English, and this applies to most of the Kinship designations,” writes Robert Lowie.<sup>314</sup> More importantly, when addressing the parents Crows utilize different words in conversing with them. For example, in the Euro-American culture, regardless of gender a child addresses the mother as mother, or mom and father as father, or dad. In Crow, both the female and male members address the mother as “Ihkaa,” while a boy will address the father as “Axee,” and the girl will call him “Basaakaa.”<sup>315</sup>

The relationship between father and child is also unique within the Crow system, “a father is full of loving-kindness for his children. When a person adjures another to grant special favor, the phrase used is often, ‘You love your children,’ i.e. ‘By love you bear your children, I beg you,’” wrote Lowie.<sup>316</sup> This exchange was common among Crows especially for warriors trying to secure the use of powerful bundles for their sons for war at the height of intertribal warfare. A parent or sibling of a young man wanting to enter the world of warfare, especially during the nineteenth century sought out an accomplished elder, usually an authority figure and simply asked, “Daalaak allaatchiisheesh,” or “You love your children.” This phrase publicly obligated the individual to take necessary steps to protect the child or sibling of the person speaking. Usually a ceremony was held for the young warrior in which good fortune was bestowed

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<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>315</sup> McCleary and Old Horn, p. 30.

<sup>316</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 18.

upon him. If the young man was successful, the warrior and his family would repay the person by holding a clan feed, as well as giving them a portion of the booty.<sup>317</sup>

In addressing and referencing siblings, Crows are gender specific, as well as age specific. ‘Akuptaille’ or blood sibling is the term used to reference the brother or sister, if they share either one or two parents.<sup>318</sup> Although they do address certain siblings using their given names, they first attach the formal address of a sibling. For example, a Crow male will address his older brother as “Biikaa,” which is translated as “Older Brother,” then he follows that with the older brother’s name. Furthermore, in addressing a female sibling, a male addresses a younger sister by utilizing the word “Basahchittaa,” which is a gender specific. A female addresses her younger brother in the same manner as a male, but when addressing an older brother, they say “Basaalaa.”

In matter of cousins, for which Crows have no translation; they address them in the same manner as brother or sister. They are older brother, younger brother, older sister or younger sister. However, in the Clan system, because a child follows a mother’s clan, and is the child of his father’s clan, the father’s sister children are considered parents of this child. Generation leveling comes into effect at this point, in which a child addressing a father’s sister’s child will speak to this person as, “My father’s sister’s child, how are you doing?” Once this is done, they are considered siblings, and the clan relationship becomes secondary. However, the clan relationship can be utilized as the children get older, or if the occasion calls for it, a person may take this cousin and use he or she for a clan aunt or uncle. The way Crows address relatives’, especially siblings adds a degree of closeness as shared by blood siblings.

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<sup>317</sup> Beaumont, Dennis, Master Thesis, p. 70.

<sup>318</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 25.

Grandparents refer to the grandchildren as “basbaapite,” and are gender specific when addressing them. The reciprocal term for the grandparents is gender specific as in regards to the grandfather. The males refer to him as “bilipxisaahke” while they address him as “axeeisaahkaa.” The females refer to the grandfather as “basaaksaahke” while they address him as “Basaaksaahkaa.”

In regard to the term aunt and uncle, the Crows have no translation. A mother and her blood sisters and female relatives ie. sisters, all regardless of age are considered mothers to one another’s children. The sisters have as much authority and responsibility for children as the mother who gave birth. Regardless of sex, the children refer to the mother and her sisters as mother, or refer to her as “Basahke,” and address them as “Ihkaa.”<sup>319</sup> The mother’s side of the family assumes more of a responsibility in nurturing the children, while a father’s family is responsible for the spiritual protection.<sup>320</sup> The mother’s brothers assume a different role in the family system, and both male and female members recognize them as older brothers.

A father and his brothers are all considered to be the father of the children, thus creating a system in which a child has a mother or father present, even in the case of losing a parent. More importantly, the father’s family has the responsibility of giving a newborn child their name. Morgan witnessed the naming of a newborn stating, “A few days after a child is born, usually about six there is a family council of the relatives on the father’s side who gave the name instead of the mother’s tribal relatives [clan].”<sup>321</sup> The father’s sister is put in a unique position held in the family system, because first of all

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<sup>319</sup> In terms of addressing an individual, a Crow speaker will add the aa at the end of the address to signify that they are speaking to that person.

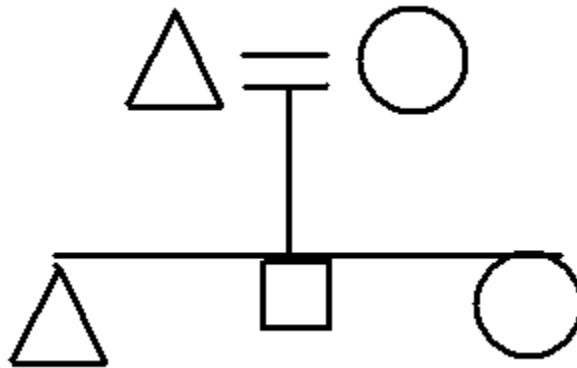
<sup>320</sup> The role of the father will be discussed in detail once clans are discussed.

<sup>321</sup> Morgan, p. 169.

there is no translation of the term “basbaaxia,” or “basahke,” and both male and female’s address and refer to her in the same manner. The term “basbaaxia” can be translated into literal terms, which means my aunt/older sister/mother.<sup>322</sup> This relation can assume the role of mother, or older sister and has a much more liberal role in the raising of the children.

## Nuclear Family

- The Ego is represented by the Square
- The Female is represented by the Circle
- The male is represented by the Triangle
- The bond of Marriage is represented by the Equal symbol<sup>323</sup>



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<sup>322</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 20.

<sup>323</sup> As the chapter progresses, more complete charts with detailed information will be added as needed.

This same process of addressing a relative is going to be followed by all members, and not only apply to blood relatives, but also to clan relatives and adopted relatives also. The greetings used toward any of the relatives regardless of blood relations, or gender and clan relations hold the same significance, and is a sign of respect.<sup>324</sup> The following chart gives a basic breakdown of how a person refers to a relative, the gender of the person speaking, and how they address them. At the end of the row an English translation is given for the various relatives.

### **CROW BLOOD KIN RELATIONSHIP TERMS**

<b>REFERENT</b>			<b>ENGLISH</b>
<b><u>SPEAKER</u></b>	<b><u>GENDER</u></b>	<b><u>ADDRESS</u></b>	<b><u>TRANSLATION</u></b>
Bilipxa	Male	Axee	Father
Basaake	Female	Basaake	Father
Basahke	Both	Ihkaa	Mother
Biike	Male	Biikaa	Older Brother
Basaale	Female	Basaalee	Older Brother
Basahkaate	Both	Basahkaataa	Older Sister

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<sup>324</sup> Today, many of these terms are still utilized, but only by Crow speaking members, and those that understand the language but don't speak it.

Basahchiite	Male	Basahchiitaa Basahchiitkaat	Younger Sister
Basooka	Female	Basooka Basookaat	Younger Sister
Bachuuke	Both	Bachuukaa Bachuukaat	Younger Brother
Balaake	Both	Baalaaka Baalaakaat	My Children
Balaakbachee	Both	Ilooshe Ilooshkaat	My Son
Balaakbia	Both	Xuuche Xuuchkaat	My Daughter
Bilipsisaahke	Male	Axeeisaahkaa	Grandfather
Basaaksaahke	Female	Basaaksaahkaa	Grandfather.

The following a further breakdown of terms used to address family members from a parent, child and sibling perspective.



Biila`pxe – Is the word for father, and is used by males of the tribe to refer one's own father, along with the brother's of the father, clan fathers, father-in-law and adopted father's.<sup>325</sup>

- Axe`e, is how a male would address one's own father, along with those mentioned above.

Basa`ake –Is the word used by females to address their father, and also includes the brother's of the father, as well as clan father's and adopted fathers and father in-laws.

- Basaaka`a, is the term used by females to address their own father along with those mentioned above.

Basahke` - This term is utilized by both male and females to refer to their mother.

- Ihka`a is how both Male and Female members of the tribe address their mother's, and includes all mothers, blood and clan and adopted.

Biike` - Men used this term to refer to an older brother, including mother's brother's, and adopted brothers.

- Biika`a is how males address their older brother's, and is spoken before the name.  
Ex: Biika`a, Gary how are you?

Basaale` - This term, much like the male term is gender specific and is used by females to refer to an older brother including the mothers brothers, clan brothers and adopted brothers. Furthermore, the term applies to a mother's sister's son, and a father's brother's son and a father's sister's son older than the speaker. Since the mother's brother is an older brother, the children become children of the speaker.

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<sup>325</sup> It is important to note here that a mother or father-in-law includes the siblings of the in-law.

- Basaale`e is how female's would address their older brother's, and would be placed before the name of the individual being referred to. Ex: Basaala`, Gary how are you?

Bashahka`ate – This term refers to an older sister and is not gender specific, so both male and female's used it. The term referred to a sister, but also clan sister's and adopted sisters.

- Basahka`ataa is how both genders would address an older sister.  
Ex: Basahka`ataa, Marie how are you?

Bashahchi`ite – Males use this term to identify a younger sister, a clan sister or adopted sister. It also includes a mother's sister's daughter, a father's sister's daughter and a father's brother's daughter. Since the mother's brother is an older brother, the children of that person would be children of the speaker.

- Bashahchi`itaa, used to directly address the younger sister. Ex: Basahachi`itaa, Nina how are you?

Basooke` - Is a gender specific term used by female's to address a younger sister, including clan and adopted and all those of her own sex that call her Bashahka`ate, or older sister.

- Basooka`a, is how a female would address a younger sister. Ex: Basooka`a, Nina how are you?

Bachuuke` - This term is used by both male and female's to refer to a younger brother, including clan and adopted brothers. Also, any people referring to the speaker as an older brother are the Bachuuke` of the speaker.

- Bachuuka`a is how both male and female's refer to a younger brother. Ex:  
Bachuuka`a, Travis how are you?

Balaake` - This term is used by both male and female parents to refer to any male or female child, including clan and adopted.

- Balaaka`a, is how a parent addressed a child. Ex: Balaaka`a, John how are you?

Balaakbachee` - Male and female member's used this term to refer specifically to a male child, clan or adopted.

- Ilo`oshe is how a mother or father would address a male child. This term refers to male child's reproductive organ.

Balaakbi`a – Both parent's use this term to refer to their female children, including clan and adopted.

- Xu`uche is how they would address the female child. This term refers to the female reproductive organ.

## **Crow Clan System**

“Ashammaleaxi,” when translated into English means “where driftwood lodges,” and represents the thirteen clans of the Crow people. These clans are matrilineal in

practice, so a child is considered to be member of his or her mother's clan.<sup>326</sup> It was further observed, "Every Crow was born into a clan that traced descent through the mother. Clans guaranteed basic civil rights and obligated members to aid, revenge, and mourn each other as brothers and sisters."<sup>327</sup> For example, a child whose mother is a member of the "Big Lodge" clan automatically becomes a member of the Big Lodges, and according to the Clan system have the right to address and refer to their clan siblings just as they would blood relations in the Crow language. In any case they will be related to the clan by blood, either closely or distantly. However, the mother's sisters, who are all "Big Lodges" are not sisters, but instead mothers, as the mother association take precedent over the clan relationship.

As for the father's clan, a child will become a child of that clan. If a child has a father that is a "Greasy Mouth" the child is considered a "Greasy Mouth Child," or "Child of the Greasy Mouths." This child, regardless of sex and age is now a part of this clan, but the other greasy mouth children are not considered siblings. Instead they are what Crows refer to as "i'wuutkuushe" or the "Teasing Clan." Teasing clans exist for several reasons; firstly, the other members of a certain teasing clan could openly joke with another member for different reasons. For example, if a person was known as lazy or rude, a member of the teasing clan was obligated to tease this person into working more or becoming nicer to other people. The person being teased can endure much public humiliation at the hands of his or her teasing clan, but it also went beyond the individual being teased. The siblings, parents, grandparents, clan siblings, children and if they were married in-laws were considered to have some responsibility in the person's

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<sup>326</sup> Lowie, *Social organizations*, 186.

<sup>327</sup> Fred Voget, *They Call Me Agnes: A Crow Narrative Based on the life of Agnes Yellowtail Deernose* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 21-22.

action, thus they too received ribbing from their teasing clans if it was acceptable to social and kinship laws. “Smaller pilferings(sic) and discord are decided by healthily abusing each other. At this game both men and women are equally adept, and their language affords a fine variety of beautiful epithets, which they bestow upon each other in great profusion,” wrote Denig regarding the teasing clans.<sup>328</sup>

Secondly, the teasing clans ensured that a person who got too self centered or egotistical did not get out of hand and jeopardize the community. This was especially true during the height of the buffalo culture because the actions of one person could result in significant negative results for the tribe. For example, if a warrior had enjoyed much success in raiding enemy camps, but appeared to be out of control, the teasing clan stepped in and made public announcements detrimental to his character. A teasing clan might proclaim that this warrior had killed so many Sioux, that we have no one else to fight, or they may be more direct and announce that this warrior has made orphans out of many Sioux children. This type of chiding usually would deter the individual being teased to either stop or reduce his raiding.<sup>329</sup>

More importantly, within the clan system a belief exists that a clan mother or father held unknown powers that if utilized properly, could result in much good fortune for a person. The clan mother or father was the father’s clan siblings. If a person was a child of the Greasy Mouth clan, all of the members of the Greasy mouths are considered to be his clan aunts and uncles. This relationship is one of the most critical aspects of Crow Culture. The clan aunts and uncles usually gave a child his or her Crow name, and in return the parents of this child would offer gifts for the name, as well as prayers for the

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<sup>328</sup> Denig, *Of the Crow Nation*, 151.

<sup>329</sup> Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 22.

child.<sup>330</sup> For example, if a young man wanted to go on a horse raiding expedition, he would approach a clan uncle. Regardless of the success of this person, or if he or she was regarded as accomplished, he or she was still held in high regards by her clan children.<sup>331</sup> After giving the person four gifts, the clan child would be prayed over by the clan mother or father, and if the raid was successful, more gifts were bestowed upon the clan mother or father. This process still exists today and is used for returning soldiers, students, or athletes.

The Crow recognize thirteen distinct clans; however, the Treacherous Lodge and Piegan Lodges may have been the same clan. The names of the clans were usually representative of something members of that particular clan had done.

- I. The Newly Made Lodge – The women of this clan often made new lodges, and were noted for this, so as a result they were referred to as the Newly Made lodges. However, another reason they were called Newly Made Lodge was because they were the last clan to be created, thus they were newly made.<sup>332</sup>
- II. Thick Lodges, or Big Lodge – Members of this band often had noticeably larger teepees than other clans, thus they were called Big Lodges.
- III. Sore Lip - Warriors from within this clan hunted often throughout the year, but during one winter a noted member stayed out in the cold too long and his lips blistered. He was referred to as having a sore lip, and his clan became the Sore Lips.

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<sup>330</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>331</sup> Voget, *The World of the Crow Indians*, p.

<sup>332</sup> Beaumont, p.25.

- IV. Greasy Inside the Mouth – This clan was called Greasy inside the Mouth because hunters from this clan were successful in their hunts and always had good meat to eat. As a result they appeared to have grease around their mouths, thus the name Greasy inside the Mouth.
- V. Without Shooting they Bring Home Game – This clan was known as excellent hunters and usually did less to take game, and as a result they were considered to use less ammunition. Another source tells of how this clan was always late in getting to the hunt, and as a result they received meat without shooting a single shot.<sup>333</sup>
- VI. Tied in a Knot – Women in this clan often waited until the last minute to pack their belongings when they were going to move camp. Once the camp began to move they would quickly tie their personal things in a bundle and tied a knot to so as to move out quick.
- VII. Filth Eating Lodge – A well known warrior among this clan was very jealous and overbearing with one of his wives. One day she had stopped to talk to another man, and the jealous husband grabbed her and forced animal droppers into her mouth. Some members of the tribe saw the entire event unfold and began to call them filth eaters.
- VIII. Kicked in their Bellies – This clan was different from the band, but the same event in which a member was kicked by a horse occurred and from that point was called Kick in their Bellies.
- IX. Bad War Honors – A group of young men from the same clan had gone off to raid from an enemy tribe and returned home without any booty.

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

However, they claimed to have taken scalps and been successful in war. Eventually, others figured out they were lying to the camp and thus were called Bad War Deeds.

- X. Whistling Water – A young man had fallen in love with a girl from another clan. The father of the girl did not want him to see her so he hid by the river to wait for her. The women often went for water and the young man whistled to get her attention, so thus the name stuck.
- XI. Streaked Lodge – The teepee's some members of this clan lived in had streaks on the hide coverings, and so other clans called them Streaked Lodges.
- XII. Piegan Lodge and Treacherous Lodge – This clan was known by two different names, but likely was one clan. They were called Piegan or Treacherous because they were considered to be very hostile and mean. Apparently, they were in a skirmish and were outnumbered by the enemy and decided to retreat. One of their members had fallen and was being surrounded but the other members of the clan did not go back to help, instead leaving him to die. As a result they were called the Piegan or Treacherous Lodges.

Eventually, because of the reduction in numbers due to warfare and disease a number of the clans disappeared, or were so few in numbers they joined with other clans. Today Crows recognize eight different clans:



- I. Big Lodge and Newly-made Lodges
- II. Sore-lip Lodge and Greasy-inside-the-mouth
- III. Without-shooting-they-bring-game
  - Tied-in-a-knot
  - Filth-eating Lodge
- IV. Kicked—in-their-bellies
  - Bad-War Honors
- V. Whistling Water
  - Streaked Lodge
- VI. Piegan Lodge
  - Treacherous Lodge<sup>334</sup>

In any case the clan system remains vital within the Crow culture, but is being lost at an alarming rate. This is in large part because the language is being lost with television and the internet, but more importantly it is not being taught in schools to young Crow children. However, the fact remains the Crow Social-Kinship system continues to be in use today, but is being lost and without immediate help from Crow elders, it could be lost forever.

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<sup>334</sup> Lowie, 9.

## **Conclusion**

If the technology existed to transport a Crow Indian from the early nineteenth century into today, what would he recognize? It would be a shock for this person to step into the world of today with all the modern technology, not to mention the sheer number of people. However, if he/she were to step onto the Crow Reservation, it is highly likely the language and the Social and Family Kinship systems are areas he/she would understand. These areas are only few of the aspects of Crow Culture that survived the turbulent events of the reservation era and assimilation processes.

In examining the reason behind the continual existence of the Social and Kinship system, we can begin pointing out major events in Crow history that had positive effects in helping to retain these systems. From the time of the split from the parent tribe, the Crows began to create and maintain a society that would protect the Social and Kinship system which it was based upon. They accomplished this through various means by simply intertwining their culture with European culture. Introductions from Europeans were accepted if it fit into the life of the Crows such as the horse, gun and various items like glass beads and cloth. Some of the introductions have helped the Crow navigating their way through the various stages of the reservation period and into the twentieth century. In essence, the Crow remained as they were since the time of separation, in regards to the Social and Kinship systems. The family unit remained the same, while the clans changed, but the way clan mothers and fathers were regarded had never changed. The joking relationship along with the in-law relationships have also undergone some changes, but for the most part remain the same. It can be argued the Crow had somehow remained at a constant state of cultural maintenance throughout all of the turbulent times

and continue to do so up to present times. The Crow were easily able to navigate between the world of the White man and the world of the Plains Indian. However, they did not serve as brokers for one side or the other, but instead remained neutral with little or no desire to claim one over the other. For example, Crow oral history suggests the Sioux had repeatedly approached the Crow to become allies and each time they denied the requests. Once the Sioux war was at its peak, the Crows chose to serve as scouts for the U.S. Army, not because they hated the Sioux, but because they understood that the world around them was going to change with or without them. The leaders understood this and through the various eras, were able to maintain Crow identity and took the Euro-Americans as introductions that could be utilized for self preservation.

Today the Crow remain a strong tribal community with various members ascending to positions within the state government, as well as many individuals obtaining college degrees. The tribe can claim one of the most recognizable Tribal Colleges in the country at Little Big Horn Community college. The college continues to preserve the Crow culture by offering courses in Crow Language, Crow Social Kinship Systems, and other areas such as Economics in Indian Country and Indian Education. By design, the tribal administration and college administration all speak the Crow Language when conducting any type of business meetings with other tribal members. This unique aspect allows tribal administrators to think in terms of Crow systems, while incorporating Euro-American concepts when running tribally controlled institutions. This can be a double edged sword for various reasons, but mainly because of the Social and Kinship systems in place. For example, the election of a Chairman usually is decided not entirely on credentials, but on the utilization of kinship. If a person is from a large family, he or she

can approach relatives, including in-laws to try and gain a position on the council. This is usually done with the assurance that if elected, members of the family would get gainful employment, help with housing, education and occasional financial assistance for home improvement or other areas as well. This type of campaigning, as it is referred to, can sometimes lead to individuals rising to power quickly, but lose it just as quickly as they gained it. It is a clear reflection of Crow political power in the nineteenth century at the height of the Horse and Buffalo culture.

Looking at the Crow in retrospect, the decisions of leaders along with the respect held within the Social and Kinship systems helped the Crow to continue to thrive. Because Crow chiefs could control aggressive warriors out to make a name for personal glory, the chiefs could actually follow their promises made to the white man. In regards to white promises being broken, they simply said, "The white man is brought up different; we have to help them become better people." The Crows view other tribes in the same manner, thinking that they are poor and need help. In any case, the Crow social and Kinship system remains strong in Crow society today, and will continue to remain strong with the aid of Crow Fair and tribal elections as well as preservation at the tribal collegiate level.

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