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Edward J. Rielly. *Sitting Bull: A Biography.* Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007. xvii + 157 pp. Plates. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-33809-0.

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Commissioned by Patrick G. Bottiger

Making Sitting Bull More Accessible

There has been a plethora of written material on Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa Lakota leader, before and since his tragic death in 1890. Part of Greenwood Press's biography series, this carefully researched and engagingly written volume is intended for high school readers and above. Edward J. Rielly's biography follows Sitting Bull's life from his early days, covering a variety of military encounters with enemy tribes as well as the United States, and finally culminating in the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It incorporates material on Lakota culture, federal politics, and military history, while evaluating Sitting Bull's devotion to Lakota values, particularly generosity; his exile with his followers to Canada and subsequent return to the United States; his performances at Wild West shows; his political advocacy and resistance to the reservation system; his relationship with the Ghost Dance; and finally his tragic death at the hands of Indian police.

The work relies on a wide variety of secondary sources, focusing heavily on two authors' studies, Robert Utley's *The Lance and the Shield* (1993), and Stanley Vestal's *Sitting Bull: Champion of the Sioux* (1957) and *Warpath: The True Story of the Fighting Sioux Told in a Biography of Chief White Bull* (1934). Rielly utilizes recent publications that he believes make his interpretations more accessible to younger readers, and he critically analyzes his sources to identify obvious discrepancies. This approach serves not only to tell a story but also to help younger readers learn how to evaluate and utilize sources. Rielly does not mention the entire corpus of publications on Sitting Bull nor does he evaluate all these sources, because such an exercise would take away from the central narrative and perhaps make the work too tedious for a young reader. The author also notes that his use of religious and cultural texts, primarily the work of physician James Walker, describes a related band (the Oglala), contending that they are relevant to Lakota religious thought during Sitting Bull's life.

There are several problems with this biography. First, given that this work is targeted for high school students, its lack of maps is puzzling, considering Rielly's use of a timeline and photographs. Most nonnatives conceive of North American geography first as countries and states, not as tribal regions, and, later, reservations. An important corrective would have been to indicate native land first and visually portray its diminishment, as well as the historical battles and tribal territories.

Second, the author uses the word "god" to describe the various spiritual entities of Lakota cosmology, which invites misunderstandings. Readers will bring their own notions of this theological term to bear, and that will hamper their attempts to understand Lakota beliefs. Furthermore, the cosmology described in this biography may not have been universal among the various groups of Lakota. The Lakota did not construct their beliefs around specific dogmas or consistent belief systems, but rather they focused on spiritual experience in ceremonies and unexpected spiritual experiences that they interpreted along local cultural guidelines. Nevertheless, the author's focus on the spiritual aspects of Sitting Bull's life is essential to understanding the man.

Rielly is careful to note the discrepancies among sources about some of the details of Sitting Bull's life, but he misses the varying interpretations concerning the death of Crazy Horse. In fact, he only cites Dee Brown as his source. The author provides careful footnotes to his work as well as a wide variety of sources in his bibliography, and balances his narrative well with a sometimes transparent methodology. This makes sense given his intended audience.

While I appreciate Rielly's enthusiasm for his subject, I find it difficult to evaluate his claim that Sitting

Bull was the greatest leader of the nineteenth century, with perhaps the exception of Abraham Lincoln (p. xi). Later, he states that Sitting Bull and DeSmet were two of the greatest spiritual leaders of the time and that Sitting Bull was seen as the greatest of all Lakotas (p. 51). There is a double irony here. First, an important trait of leadership in Lakota society is to be humble and downplay one's importance. Second, the Lakota were, and in many ways continue to be, a decentralized band society that operated on local rather than universal consensus. While scholars continue to recognize Sitting Bull's importance, they also identify other individuals who were highly regarded. One must balance between gaining and rejecting status in a society that is more egalitarian than hierarchical. The message, however, that Sitting Bull was and remains an important figure to natives and nonnatives, remains valid. Fortunately, the author also tempers his assertions with some mention of Sitting Bull's detractors.

My last concern is about the book's conclusion. Sitting Bull lived in a world and culture that transformed radically, and, while these discontinuities are significant, certain continuities also play a more important role–Lakota culture remains viable and flourishing with an influence well beyond its tribal boundaries, as evidenced in part by the writing of this book. Sitting Bull's greatest monuments are not a college in his name, or a sculpture at his burial place, or even a vast number of publications, but rather his relatives who continue to make their way in this world while facing many of the same challenges that confronted their ancestors. The greatest tribute to Sitting Bull is the continuity of his people. Retelling stories is essential for the life of a people. Sitting Bull, for example, drew pictures to recount his brave deeds. In today's pluralistic world, it is important that we consider the various peoples and cultures–whether noble or shameful–that shape society so that we can learn from our mistakes and build on our successes.

Greenwood has created a rather eclectic array of biographies for this series, including Biggie Smalls, Al Capone, Mother Theresa, Johnnie Depp, and Ralph Nader. There are three native people in the series so far: Sitting Bull, Tecumseh, and Sakagawea. While the rest of the biographies are heavily tilted to twentieth-century personalities, it is unfortunate that so far the three native entries, though extremely worthy, are nineteenth-century figures. I hope that the series will expand to include biographies of contemporary native persons.

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