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Gary C. Anderson’s *Sitting Bull and the Paradox of Lakota Nationhood* delves into the complex dynamics and challenges faced by Sitting Bull as he attempted to maintain the sovereignty of the Lakota people during intense conflicts with expanding American frontiers. Initially published in 2007, this edition includes a new afterword by the author. Anderson paints a vivid picture of Sitting Bull’s leadership, emphasizing his dedication to preserving traditional values and ways of life against overwhelming external pressures related to settler colonialism. He notes, “The more Sitting Bull and his followers sought to unify and define Lakota nationhood, and the more it seemed so distinctly different from what the Americans had to offer, the more the Lakota leadership faced factionalism and decay” (p. xiv).

The narrative traces Sitting Bull’s formative years, depicting his rise as a leader amid the American invasion, the formulation of Sioux leadership within his community, and the crucial defense strategies he employed against encroachments on the Lakota homeland. The biography discusses his strategic retreat to Canada and his later years, particularly his involvement in the Ghost Dance movement, underscoring the challenges of his leadership and the decline of independent Lakota nationhood.

Anderson’s narrative also emphasizes Sitting Bull’s time in Canada, illustrating his ongoing resistance against settler colonial assertions. This period is critical for understanding the international scope of Indigenous resistance and resonates with contemporary discussions on Indigenous rights in Canada. Notably, it ties into recent legal affirmations of Indigenous self-governance, underscored by the Supreme Court of Canada’s 2024 ruling in *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada v. Attorney General of Canada*, which upheld Indigenous governance over child and family services.

While Anderson’s biography offers a detailed and empathetic portrayal of Sitting Bull’s life, it is essential for readers to critically engage with this narrative, recognizing that broader societal contexts of settler colonialism influence the history and its telling. This engagement is crucial because it reveals another paradox beyond the one mentioned in the book’s title: the narrative, authored from within a settler colonial framework, is part of the history it attempts to recount. This critical engagement requires understanding that settler colonialism, as Manu Karuka describes, is “colonization by replacement,” which affects all societal levels—politics, law, culture, and economics.[1]

Such engagement ensures that the complexities of Sitting Bull’s leadership and resistance are
neither simplified nor romanticized. Anderson's *Sitting Bull and the Paradox of Lakota Nationhood* does a good job in this regard. It compels us to critically reflect on the narratives we perpetuate about Indigenous leaders and the frameworks we use to understand their legacies. This book is particularly suitable for courses in Native American studies, American history, and cultural studies, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of Native American resistance against colonial pressures. It would also benefit policymakers, activists, and the general public interested in American and Canadian history. Educators, scholars, historians, and biographers will find Anderson's approach instructive. This ensures the book's broad and impactful reach in discussions about Indigenous history and its implications for contemporary society.

Note


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