

Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors Study Guide

Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors by Stephen Ambrose

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Plot Summary

This is a remarkable book about two of the country's best warriors. The circumstances of their lives led them to be working on opposing sides of a conflict. The author describes both following the dictum of divining what makes someone successful in their roles, more so than taking a political stake in one side and demonizing the opposition. Realistically, this is easier to do now that so much time has passed to heal the wounds of the wars that the subjects of this book participated in.

The work is long and covers the circumstances of their lives. The work ends after the deaths of both, as matters are "cleared up." After a substantial 24 chapters covering 4 parts of the book the author has provided some special appendices at the end.

The introduction explains a great deal to readers. Both of the men lived violent lives and died violent deaths. This was a natural side effect of their roles as warriors. How they developed into being military leaders is explained and Ambrose unfolds the true story almost as well as it must have unfolded in real life. Although the outcome is known, readers feel as though it is not.

The book chronicles changing times. The level of technology, the number of citizens, the transformation of wild lands into cultivated farmland are all part of this story. The direct influence of this upon the Sioux people is shown. There is loss and grieving associated with progress rather than only seeing one side of an issue. In some ways the book shows what happened to the white men thousands of years earlier, often at the hands of one another before the same changes arrived in the Americas.



Intro & First 4 Chapters

Intro & First 4 Chapters Summary and Analysis

At the very beginning of the book there are three separate pieces of introductory material. The first is a list of photographs, the second a set of maps. These help readers to understand how to put the work into context.

The introduction gives a synopsis of the two warriors this book is dedicated to. The author reveals some striking similarities in addition to some profound differences.

What follows is some description of the Midwestern plains. The region is rather vast, with more desert-like regions to the Southwest, running on North to South over fifteen hundred miles. East to West the range at the time was similar. There was a great deal of forest in the Eastern to middle part of this terrain. Further West are the world famous plains where there were hardly any trees, tall natural grasses and herds of giant herbivores—the buffalo who fed on them and could tolerate the wind.

The grasses themselves rooted down to two feet. This kept them alive during the harsh winters when everything on the surface died. These were later forcibly removed and their hold on the terrain overcome in order for the pioneers to transform the region into farmland. A different process was performed where there were forests, but to the same end: the change over from wild lands to farmlands cultivated by humans.

The weather of the expansive Midwestern region has its own ways, just as every region does. Extremes are not the norm, but they serve as an awe inspiring counter point to otherwise steady and stable climes. A weather front called a chinook can sweep across the plains. Unlike many other locations, the front does not "sneak up" nor does it blend in with the other weather. As such, when it hits, the temperatures can plummet or skyrocket 40 Fahrenheit degrees in a few minutes. In other "wild weather," the Midwest, which has a rather low amount of rain over all, tends to get most of it in rather short intense bursts. For a long time there will be no rain, and then it rains so hard that the rivers swell to maximum capacity and often spill over their banks. In just a few hours the river's edge can move laterally twenty feet (6.5Meters) and there can be nearly a meter, or 5 Imperial Feet of standing, flowing water where there had been nothing and just a few days later there would be nothing again. Above and beyond this, hail storms form with relatively high frequency and intensity in the Midwest with less sleet and snow than other regions. This is mainly true in the South Central Midwest such as Indiana rather than in Wisconsin, where snows are of the Northern variety. Tornadoes are the final extreme weather formation closely associated with the Midwest. These are created by fascinating interfaces between air fronts. Tornadoes are only a problem for people when their funneled ends come into contact with structures at the ground level. However, when they do, they mock the great ambitions of man by tearing apart warehouses or other large buildings as if they were toys being broken by a young mischievous child, flung here and there. The rest of the time, the weather is bright and mild throughout



much of the region, with strong breezes that flow without the obstacles created by forests or—two centuries later, sky scrapers and other buildings. As such, it is fantastic for crops.

The author begins to provide a biography of Crazy Horse. Stephen Ambrose reveals to readers many of the cultural traits of the Sioux culture. He shows how the way they were raised influenced their adult behavior. The native children were generally allowed to do whatever they felt like, following their intuitions and natural inclinations. There were times when this had bad affects but often enough it was fine. This does not mean there were no limits on their behavior and they were taught tribal "normalcy," such as bead working and cooking for girls, with hunting and rough games for the boys.

When the children became old enough they would go through ritual preparations and then go to seek their individual visions. The tribe would accept a lot of types of behavior but they had a tendency to generalize gender roles and sexual orientation behaviors together, or so it seems. During his description of Crazy Horse's childhood, Stephen Ambrose depicts one of the boys, called Pretty One, who turned out to be what they call a winkte. His vision would naturally reflect this; he had a preference for the female lifestyle although he was male. He was accepted and allowed to live this way, but he was expected to have homosexual relations with men since that would be heterosexual by gender role but homosexual by biology. At the time of his own vision, the boy who would later be known to history as Crazy Horse, was quite young, only 13 years old when he sought his vision. He went unprepared, meaning that he had none of the special rites, but his father then called Crazy Horse was a medicine man—a holy man, the local "priest." Perhaps this was a special kind of preparation itself. It was not until some time later that he shared the vision with his father, who interpreted it for him. It contained significant information about his personal values, attitudes, needs and personality, all in images.

In his youth, Crazy Horse was called Curly. He was exceptionally fair skinned for one of the Sioux. Later this turned out to be because he and his father had the same name. It was many years before the father granted his son use of the name, and once he did, he used a nickname for the rest of his life.

Curly discovered that like so many of the other boys of his tribe he would adopt one of the normal roles: he would become a warrior. When, at age 15 he had shared the dream with his father, he was told simply to obey the older man who appeared to him in the dream as that was himself. There were 3 additional instructions from his father: 1) look after & protect the helpless; 2) provide food for the hungry; 3) be brave.



Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 Summary and Analysis

By this time, the author is focused more upon the political and military climate of the region.

The young Curly has become Crazy Horse—a source of confusion as his father bears the same name.

In chapter 4, readers are introduced to the white-red conflict as it appeared on the Plains. There were military garrisons of the US government. There were trails of settlers from the East and Europe making their way through the territory. The natives had their own needs and desires. There was internal cultural strife between those who would hang around near to where the white man had forts, supply lines and goods that they could not get from anyone else.

The author explains a great deal more about the cultural differences. The white man, more than harboring simple hostility towards the red man, mainly wanted the red man to work if they wanted the white man's materials. However, the white man did want the native savages to develop a desire and taste for these things- be they coffee or fur hats or firearms or Scottish cotton linen, French weaving, and footwear. The white man wanted to transform, where they did not wish to destroy, the red man into people who worked, who were civilized and disciplined like themselves and would make sensible trading partners. People who would work to have money to buy goods from them...this is what many but not all the white people wanted to do to the red man.

The red men were divided amongst themselves about the white man and the various products that they had for sale. Some felt strongly that the right thing to do was to stay away from it, and to keep the cultures separate. Others had gone beyond what happened with the fur traders back East a century or two earlier, and they wanted coffee and whiskey and refined sugar cane.

The other side of this, was that of conflict. The red man tended to harrass the emigrants along the Oregon Trail and at other locations—breaking wagons sometimes hurting and killing a few people and taking goods that they might otherwise buy or trade for. Here and there, there would also be reason for direct conflict.

The white man built forts, usually as part of the government. Naturally, the settlers did not like being randomly attacked by "wild Indians" as they moved towards their new homes. This caused the US government to retaliate. These events caused the Sioux to develop in a new way. They were pressured into devising a more centralized leadership, which they had not done until the whites kept asking for "their leader" in a way that forced them to elect one man from amongst their leadership to be "the one." During this time Conquering Bear became the chief of the Sioux—the liaison between the white



man and the red man; later he was killed by the white man. After that, the lad Curly turned into Crazy Horse.

The main enemies of the Sioux at this time, were not, groups of white men. Rather, they were other tribes. The Sioux denied their overwhelming trouble and defeat on their Eastern front by concentrating their efforts on their weaker opposition—the Crow people off to their Western front. The Pawnee and Crow and Shoshoni were the main enemies of the Sioux, with the confusion about the white man and his presence as a threat a secondary issue.

Chapters six and seven are devoted to the next stage of life of Custer and Crazy Horse. During chapter 6 the author Stephen Ambrose describes Custer's experience as a cadet and then as a West Point student. The man became quite popular there and did successfully make contacts with very socially prominent people—"controllers" who helped to ensure that he was able to get good positions within his field.

He was trained to be an officer, and this included acquiring a more advanced education in a broader range of subjects. West Point was a high quality college. Custer became known for having a good sense of humor and lovely hair.

The seventh chapter is dedicated to a point by point comparison of the two men when they were in their late teens and early twenties. The difference that emerges most strongly has to do with individual discipline and how it empowers a group. While strict discipline is hard on the individuals within the system, it also develops them and permits new opportunities that would not occur otherwise. The author describes Crazy Horse as having the type of order to which the 'red man' was subjected, that of a purely natural sort. Custer's life was far more regimented.

The author explains that in their respective societies, both of the men had become very noticeable in a good way. The author describes them as having noteworthy, "...unusual drive, daring and initiative," (p. 121). Both men had been presented with opportunities and the "ways of men" shown to them when they were boys. For Crazy Horse, the scope of the red man's world was more within his own grasp. He knew what the choices were, and within them could personally experience most of what the world had to offer. This was not the case for the white man.

Like with the red men, the individual white man and his family was apt to present limited options in relation to the whole of the society. The difference is that, by the time of Custer the scope of opportunities that existed for "men as an entire group" were so vast that they were far beyond the grasp of any one man. This shows both the greatness of the white culture, but also the unreality associated with the idea of "the man" in relation to his society. For outsiders, such as women, who may have fallen under the delusion that a given man could do just about anything, their freedom appeared to be far more extensive than it actually was. Custer grew up having an awareness of boundless options. There was work that he might pursue; he was not restricted to one choice, nor did he really have hundreds of options. From amongst what he wanted, that he could do, he was able to pursue his military aspirations. Naturally doing so prevented him



from engaging in a number of other fields. For the white man, the dependency upon others is recognized. The white man has to rely upon men he will never even know, in addition to those he does, for his very well being. The military man, for instance, probably never meets the miners who find and refine the very metals that are then sent to craftsman who manufacture the military arms that he bears and relies upon to perform his tasks as an officer, yet he could not do this without them. This is part of the essence of the advantages of "the white man's culture." This is only possible because of how much so many people work. The down side is that his organic nature, his personal freedom to move according to his own whims and the rhythms of his own body and its needs are restricted by the society in ways that the red man did not suffer from.



Chapters 8-10

Chapters 8-10 Summary and Analysis

In the entire work there are four parts that readers will find labeled as "books." This is Book 2. There are five chapters of text under this heading, covered here by two summary sections. The first summary section corresponds to the first three chapters of part two as they are mainly concerned with both love and war. The author describes and then contrasts the Native ways with the American ways of going about this.

The first of these chapters begins from 1858. Here the author Stephen Ambrose reminds readers that the Sioux nation was subdivided not so much into tribes but into groups better described as "bands." The Oglala were the band of Sioux that Crazy Horse belonged to.

There were good times for the people of Crazy Horse when they abandoned the sugar and coffee and other enticements marketed by the white men. When they stayed away from the Oregon Trail, gave up whiskey and rode free and far-ranging on half wild ponies, their lives resumed the "Indian ideal." Stephen Ambrose, the author, shares a reasonably accurate depiction of this realizable "ideal." They made war against their enemies, but only during the Summer. They mainly did this for the exact same reasons that some of the "white man & his tribes" attacked the red men: to take the land, or access to it and to keep hunting ground or other resources readily accessible through victory in battles and wars. The red men were better at keeping their losses to a minimum, especially since they counted coup, but the white men were superior at being able to organize longer battles and even entire campaigns and wars. So the Sioux took buffalo ranges from the Crow tribes and were merry.

There is another difference. During this period of time, the author explains to readers the simple distinction between the whites, including amongst the military leadership, who had some familiarity with the red men and those who did not. At the Laramie Council, Crazy Horse had been introduced to both friends and enemies, of the same red race but of different tribes. During his early years he had been introduced to the white man but he did not know very much about the race or the Americans that it represented.

There was some cultural cross-fertilization amongst the races. This had occurred during the fur trade. It happened when there was heavier trading between the peoples and often in cases where their situations were that of equals or else when one side took members of the other into their fold as prisoners of war. Europeans had done this amongst the tribes of their own continent before doing this sort of thing to the red man. For his own part, the

red men would sometimes adopt into their tribes captives—prisoners of war and the innocent babes of peoples defeated in war. All of these ways of relating and more caused some people to know about the so-called North American Indians—now called



Native Americans—whereas others did not. Even today there are some secluded tribal societies about whom industrialized peoples are curious but also hypersensitive in regards to how much the tribal peoples need to be left alone if they are to be able to continue on with the lifestyles they currently have. There are still sensitivities to diseases and the need for vast tracts of land to support such tribes of "free people." There is little way for the rest of the humans to learn more without destroying these precious groups of people who are, most likely, living in or near the stone age level of technology.

Culturally, the author educates readers as they proceed through the work. By now, the instructive and mildly excited tone of the writer has become familiar. The view is lively, the world's diversity is being explained without oversimplification by the author. Military leadership is one place where success is not the same for each side. On the white side, the majority of military leadership—the only kind referred to in the book—is that of the government's military. There are ranks of leaders with specific tasks and numbers of soldiers under them. This was the case in the America of the 1800s. Unlike a typical military officer, however, the Natives just had "war parties." The size of this group might vary and those who chose to fight under a given leader tended to make that decision on the basis of a particular battle, rather than as a long term commitment. Commitment would come in some cases, but as a natural event for the red men whereas for the US military it was structured, though of course troops preferred it when they had a leader whom they felt deep personal loyalty towards.

Crazy Horse grew prestigious by virtue of being an excellent hunter. The author once again translates across cultural boundaries by explaining that hunting is the Oglala Sioux's profession.

Crazy Horse also grew famous amongst the Oglala Sioux as a warrior. While the Natives did not have the same kind of structure as the white men's federal and state military services did, they did have a system. Crazy Horse participated in war parties every summer season for decades and was known to be quite successful. The redskins were so free and disorganized in this respect that unlike the whites, not even this highly reputable warrior even had a consistent number of warriors under him in any given campaign against the Crow. It is also important to realize that the real reason that the red men were so often called horse thieves is because they in fact were this. Taken out of context, however, it might be easy to misunderstand. The stealing, was a taking that was of a conquest nature. Taking ponies and horses from the enemy was part of warfare and battles. This was not regarded as common thievery, nor was it "stealing from one's own people." On the contrary, this was taking from the enemy. There was also the cultural norm of sharing the newly taken ponies amongst the people so no one would end up either too poor or too rich.

The ultimate weakness of the red man that caused them to lose was their lack of structure and hierarchical order when compared with the white men's systems. It may also be true that the red men were less fierce in terms of tending to minimize losses...but in this respect they were like the Arabians of the ancient world where their



numbers caused them to wage war a certain way. This weakness will repeatedly surface.

In yet another cultural note: the natives fought so much with bows that many would only resort to the use of a club in the case that the warrior had grown 'black hearted' from some event or set of events. This was often done while singing death songs. Evidently, something was wrong with the warrior emotionally to fight this way, or so the people tended to believe.

Chapter 9 begins with a brief description for the Natives in the 1860s. In 1861-1865, the Americans were so preoccupied with their own Civil War that they were less imposing upon the Western frontier. Emigrants however, continued to stream Westward. This reality showcased a missed opportunity for the Natives. The American Civil War provided the Sioux and other tribes the chance to aggressively protect their Eastern frontier and to reclaim some of their lands. However, they seemed to have an entirely different attitude towards the situation. The tribes were so lacking in overarching unity or else in hostility, or in a combination of these forces, that they did not seem to really see that the white tribes and the United States were going to be relentless in their conquest of the Continent from East to West, and they were willing to very nearly destroy the native populations in doing so. As readers are well aware, this is what transpired. There are a million or so living tribal members throughout the region that has become unquestionably dominated by the United States of America. There are probably at least one million more people of mixed blood who are closely connected with the tribes, and another million invisible or partially visible mixed breeds who identify at least in part with their native ancestry. Even so, during the Civil War, the native tribes did not suddenly unite and assault the whites on their Eastern frontier. In purely military terms this was a fatal error. It seems that the natives were content with what they had left, which was a good 1500 miles East to West and as much North to South. Nevertheless, this Golden Opportunity passed them by, and led to their decisive defeat.

In chapter 10, entitled War and Love Among the Americans, the counterpart to Crazy Horse, George Armstrong Custer, comes into his own through participation in the Civil War. He flourished in the environment of warfare and openly admitted this. He was every inch a soldier. The camaraderie was a joy, the violence was acceptable and at times also pleasing. Through experience he strengthened as a leader to become an ever greater soldier.

As the author describes Custer's situation the intensity of the cultural difference grows clear. George Armstrong Custer had a few marked advantages for his progress in the military. First was that he really liked the military life—it suited his disposition. Second, he was naturally cheerful which made people like it when he was around. Third, he was quite playful even though he was also very much a serious fighter. Fourth, he was able to be friends with those on both sides of a war. Fifth, he was a West Pointer, and the Union Army was controlled by West Pointers who also looked out for their own in a special way. Sixth, he had a dramatic and unique style—during the Civil War military men were not forced to dress the same way and even long hair was tolerated. Seventh, he was very bold and courageous—he was promoted from second lieutenant (bottom of



the officers) up to Captain when he checked the depth of a river for their General. This simple action moved him from the back of the column of soldiers to the front. Finally, he was a very good warrior.

Stephen Ambrose explains to readers other features of the Army at that time. There was division within it. The men, including the top leaders, were often brash hard drinking sorts. Officers made progress in two essential ways. They performed well in the field, and they ran errands for their superior officers around the office. Paperwork was minimal, and decisions were meaningful. Custer was happy to loyally serve his superior officers. Thanks to his talent, his skills, his important contacts in high status places, and his time in history, George Armstrong Custer was able to make the first rank of General even though he came from relatively humble beginnings. He was from a large family that grew as a result of remarriage.

The author explains that both Crazy Horse and George Custer loved battle and war. Custer had no emotional difficulty regarding fighting opponents who he liked just fine as people. He did not war against the red men because he hated them; similarly, he did not hate his enemies, the Confederates of the secession South. He was also at peace with warring against them. Not everyone can sustain such a duality. While the native religion did not preclude summertime war parties, many whites were not up for life-death combat in the context of Christianity and its injunction against killing their fellow man.

The author Stephen Ambrose provides far more detailed information about Custer's life. However unpalatable it may be to abolitionists and integrationists, the truth was that even though Custer was in the Union Army he was entirely racist and not even against slavery. Custer had a female cook whom he he did not treat particularly well when he was a young officer. He was also blessed with a male teenager who served, essentially, as his squire. The lad went with Custer whenever he could and assisted however he was allowed and able to.

While the author gives some description of the military order, he also informs readers about the disorder. This seems to be a side effect of the same conditions that enable to the white military forces to have developed superior strategic methods over the red men.

The red men had "men's groups" devoted in part to taming and soothing the hot headedness of the young men. Further, no warrior was ever forced to follow a leader as part of a war party unless he really wanted to. In the Union Army, however, the enlisted men were forced under leaders many times without having developed a personal reason for following them. As such, there were often rebellious attitudes or obedience accompanied by protestations and objections. There was resentment and insecurity based upon the reality that the enlisted men were supposed to just trust leaders who had not proven themselves worthy of their support. Ambrose gives account of some of how this manifested in Chapter 10.

Stephen Ambrose describes the love affair between George Custer and Libbie, who was his wife. There was definite friction between the hopeful George Custer and



Libbie's father. Libbie did make efforts for women's progress in a simple yet time honored manner. She became educated at a seminary, which included sewing skills, and musical lessons. She was literate, made herself reasonably well read and was also an excellent horsewoman. She publicly asked people, including men, how they felt about higher education for women and through doing so advanced the idea and its cause by at least presenting it to the public for discussion. Ambrose assures readers that Libbie was both brave and intelligent and writes as if almost confused that she was, as far as anyone can tell, truly happy being George Custer's wife. After his death she took no other as a substitute and her love for him remained as strong as her own life. Libbie enjoyed her role of supporting her increasingly famous husband and underlying their entire romance seems to have been a deep and genuine love. For the sake of contrasting the standards of behavior of Libbie's time with that of the present day America, the author includes a few of anecdotes. Custer was from a lower class family, and one bout of public drunkenness was enough for him to be chastised so severely by one of his sisters that he behaved well for the rest of his life. Custer touched Libbie's elbow once, as he helped her to board a train, and her father was so upset at the depth of intimacy between the two that he chastised his daughter for "being loose" because she allowed him to touch her arm while helping her to board a train. Obviously her father was out-of-hand with his disproportionate reaction and yet at the same time this father was absolutely right about Custer's intentions. The two later married and were happy together. Libbie reached an agreement with Custer that since she had to leave her family and even give up the name of her childhood, George would have to relent and bring her along with him. As a result, she even ended up encamped near the front lines during the war.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary and Analysis

The next chapter carries on with a consistent tone. The book is engaging and quite clear. The language has not been oversimplified nor has the love of prose caused excessive use of flowery words. The personal development of each of the main characters of the story and their military careers are wonderfully portrayed. The author does the nation and the readers a great service by educating the readers in both the native culture and the white culture. Subtopics including social class are included in the work also.

The main leadership skill that Custer actually had was that he was an excellent small unit commander. While it is well known that rising in the ranks in the military actually requires an ability to handle various types of leadership and tasks, it is encouraging to see that initiative and the ability to lead a group of 4 can also indicate the capacity to lead columns of men just as effectively.

The author turns again to military discipline and its effects. During the Civil War, there were heavy losses under Custer's leadership. However, the Union won, even in the face of these losses. Ambrose informs readers that the civilized white men of the Army would follow their leaders even unto near-certain or certain death, especially if it meant obtaining an otherwise impossible victory. The red men would not do this; if the odds were not strongly enough in their favor, they would tend to disengage. Stephen Ambrose tells the readers that this is an important distinction between the red man's methods and the white man's approach. Victories never achievable by the red man were possible for the Army, and white men died in droves for the causes for which they fought.

The final chapter of the second sub-book is entitled Crazy Horse and Custer as Young Warriors. Ambrose begins by explaining for readers that warriors of both the red and the white races held bravery up as the highest of military virtues for males. It is also true that there was a strong contrasting characteristic of each, which reflected their respective cultures with pinpoint accuracy. The white men would meet their own deaths, sacrificing themselves to higher purposes controlled by their leaders. Red men would not do this; the red men also viewed any leader who caused heavy losses to be a failure. This being the case, the red men and the white saw even the others' best examples as failures as well as successes. On both the red and white sides, the younger brothers of these two great leaders were reputed to develop an equal degree of courage to everyone's joy.

The author contrasts a few more aspects of culture. Unlike the matriarchal society of the natives of the Eastern woodlands tribes, the red men of the Plains were, like their white European counterparts, a patriarchal society. Prior to 1800, the Iroquois had been egalitarian-matriarchal even though the chiefs were typically male. Native cultures were



not universally patriarchal, and this was true up into the late 1700s until European codes overcame part but not all of the Houdensawnee peoples' egalitarian oligarchy of the Northeast. As it happens the gender roles were not much altered by this equality; the women all voted and the attitude towards the females was the key difference. Even so, both Custer and for Crazy Horse viewed women as hierarchically inferior to men; they were seen as similar to children. While lovable and easy enough to cherish, they were expected to be dependent upon men for much of their safety and the wellbeing that comes with financial support. In this respect, they were often legally seen more as property than as other free people with all of the responsibilities to care for them that having property entails. Custer was heavily influenced by his culture's attitude towards women. Crazy Horse was also.

Crazy Horse was best known for being quiet and introspective in contrast to Custer's outgoing persona. Both were highly individualistic, but this was the norm for the red man's culture whereas it was a bit unusual amongst white men. During this chapter, Mr. Ambrose explains that Crazy Horse fell in love. The woman's name was Black Buffalo woman. The two did not marry, but his love for her remained. In fact it comes up later because her husband dislikes it.

The author concludes this last section of Part Two with a reminder to readers of very basic characteristics of Crazy Horse and Custer. One of these is that they were both hunters. Crazy Horse hunted more than Custer, as this was what he did for a living. Custer was not famous for being a hunter of animals to get meat, but was best known for his soldiering. Custer could hunt, but probably not as well as Crazy Horse. Crazy Horse was famous for both hunting and making war, but he hunted big game a few times each year and he went out leading war parties just a few times each year and this was enough to keep the people safe and well fed, and his reputation intact.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary and Analysis

Mr. Ambrose has explained to readers how each man was born and raised, so each can be understood within the proper cultural context. Each has been shown through his early years so that at the beginning of this third portion the readers have mental images of well developed military leaders: one on the side of the US government, the other on the side of the Sioux. It is doubtful, despite the obvious nature of what was going on in the East, that the Sioux really understood that the US amounted to a common enemy for all the tribes.

The year of great significance in this case is 1868. The Sioux were unable to fend off the whites along the more Northerly region of the Great Plains. The threat moved to the heart of their territory. One of the leaders was able to head an entire military campaign. A military campaign is often less than all out war, but includes a few limited aims and prolonged and repeated contact with the opposition. It requires more long term planning and specific preparation than any single battle would. A red man by the name of Red Cloud was able to provide the leadership needed to accomplish this task. Crazy Horse became a field commander for this mission, able to serve under Red Cloud, which gave him precious experience in facing the threat from the white man.

The white populace of America wanted to concentrate on the joyous expansion of the railroads through the West. There was some division regarding the best course of action to take; this divisiveness led to trouble and to weakness in the entire campaign. However, obviously, there was nothing to do other than to attack the natives any time that they interfered with the trains and of course, the settlers had to be protected. As a result, the tribes were attacked wherever their activities interfered with those of the Americans at the pre-stated points.

Meanwhile, the natives tended to guard their lands with great love and passion. The time of Red Cloud indicated a growing awareness of the threat. They naturally fought to protect what was theirs and endeavored to guard their people from trouble.

There are a few players of great significance during these chapters. Custer has been shipped out to guard Texas where controlling his own men has been as difficult as keeping the upper hand over the former Confederates. His wife is with him. He is still a young man, only 25 years old.

Crazy Horse is finally in a situation where he gets to be under another leader from amongst his own people. He joins Red Cloud's large scale campaign against the white threat known as a fort. Fort Phil Kearny became the white outpost for what proved to be a serious challenge for the red and white men in Sioux country. The Fort was headed up by a man named Carrington who was very important in the Indian frontier. The author refers to, but does not name, one of the officers under him as "decidedly cautious,"



allowing his leader's wisdom and knowledge of the red men's ways to help guard the white interest in the territory. Tragedy occurs when an overzealous Captain Fetterman succeeds in obtaining control from his superior Carrington. Carrington had sensed something and provided specific advice and recommendations of caution. Unfortunately, Fetterman had a pre-established idea in his head about being able to defeat the Sioux all at once with 80 men. This, along with his inexperience and youthful bravado caused him to fall into a lethal trap of the Sioux, one that Carrington had warned them about. There was a distinctive set of tricks that the Sioux tended to use, of which Carrington was well aware but for which Fetterman fell. Fetterman and his fellow Captain Brown ended up killing each other so that they would not die at the hands of the Sioux who had just slaughtered most of Fetterman's 80 men.

The years 1866 to 1868 were also times of major transition for Custer. He was demoted from General all the way down to Captain. This happened even though there was at least one man trying to get him promoted to two star General. This occurred because although he had finally turned abolitionist, he was still against the newly freed slaves being able to obtain suffrage. Custer was forced into an intense contemplation of his position. He was fortunate in that he had many allies and friends who could help him with finding lucrative job opportunities in both business and politics. To give a sense for the wages: as a one star General he earned \$8,000 in a year and that was good money although it did not make him rich, whereas a Captain earned \$2,000 per year. The truth was that Custer was not interested in having an office job even though he was attracted to the money. He got lucky, when a moderate compromise came along. He was able to get back up to Lieutenant Colonel and to be sent to Indian country at a time when there was sure to be more action and a greater need for leadership. Also, due to his position as a Fort Commander, he was going to be very close to being "in charge." This was a wonderful solution for him.



Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary and Analysis

A new era is ushered in with this chapter. The two men who are the features of this book are coming closer together. Crazy Horse has made his home on the Plains for his entire life and knows it like the back of his hand. Custer on the other hand, has not worked much in that part of the country but has served the US military at levels of hierarchy that go beyond anything the Plains Sioux Indians have ever done.

Custer is going to work a campaign. This is far from the first for him, but the author has just explained in the previous chapters that not until Red Cloud had the Sioux ever had a leader who could orchestrate even one military campaign.

Custer led the 7th cavalry, an entire military column of men. This is 800 horsed soldiers. The officers who worked under him fell into one of two factions: those who liked his leadership and those who obeyed despite their dislike. Lieutenant Tom Custer, Captain George Yates, and Lieutenant William Cooke were genuine followers of their Custer. Captain Frederick Benteen and a man named Robert West endured Custer as their Lieutenant Colonel in order to not lose their jobs or face Court Martial. Due to a high level of internal strife in the ranks, disloyal officers did face Court Martial with a disturbing frequency.

Both the Natives and the whites were hostile towards each other at times. During negotiations Old Man Afraid turned out to be a spokesman for the Sioux. Red Cloud went with him but often kept silent. Both sides began to suffer from the lack of centralized government on the part of the Indians. The redskins were generally illiterate. They came up with a special rite, called "touching the pen" for times when the white men needed a signature from a Sioux leader but there was no such thing. The native would touch the pen and then a white man would write down the native's name onto the paper as he knew how to use the pen.

Custer and the men of the 7th Cavalry were ignorant about the natives and of the terrain. Custer found a local man, a scout, who was far more familiar with it. The man's name was Comstock and like the famous Wild Bill Hickock he was no military man. Comstock had lived on the Plains for 20 years and knew the area well. Ambrose explains that the scouts were extremely nonverbal and would only respond to direct questions which created strange challenges regarding how to get the needed information from them. Custer hatched a plan that included making it easier for him to include his wife on campaigns, and their love had only grown deeper. He had to lure the enemy into positions where he could keep an eye on them, so generally encouraged the Indians to stay within proximity of the fort. As Custer grew familiar with the Great Plains, his passion for the location grew: the high quality of the hunting grounds transformed him into an avid hunter. He developed a hearty respect for the natives. His military role was actually more like policing- he was meant to protect people and keep the peace.



Men under him on the white side, and young warriors on the other side disliked it, and they urged more fighting on both sides.

The next portion of the chapter is devoted to how Custer was introduced to Indian fighting. This occurs as part of his education about the local culture. There is a short explanation that Carrington was moved to a different fort and that his career was viewed as having been ruined by the Fetterman disaster. It was in response to that incident that had brought Custer out on the Plains. Captives taken by the red men often ended up so happily converted that they would not even leave their former captives when given a genuine opportunity to do so. Often they would be discovered to have "gone Indian" or native. At the same time, Custer was so anxiously protective of his wife that there was a standing order that she could be shot dead by whites rather than being allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. He was especially afraid that she might be raped—the author does not indicate that the Sioux had any tendency to do this as a war method. It might well have been an irrational or disproportionate fear but Libbie herself was okay with the regulation as both agreed that rape was a fate worse than death. As it happened, this did not even come up. The action between the men was all sexless violence. The Natives were raiding supply vehicles. By the end of the chapter they had moved up to attacking trains. General Sherman, who Custer was under, had ordered him to chase after Natives on the Plains which, as a general strategy, was known to not work. Custer learned more about the Plains and so did the men, who were also "whipped into shape" using this method. Even so, it was a frustrating sequence of events. The author gives readers a deeply personal feeling for Custer's position by explaining that the man had been urged by his General to change techniques and to seek out direct conflict with the Sioux as soon as possible. This caused him to be apart from his wife for months, which had a compounding affect the longer that it went on. Finally he made the decision to rejoin her, dragging the 7th Cavalry along with him. At that time, the red men were causing trouble using the following types of attacks: they cut telegraph lines, they attacked wagon trains, they sometimes attacked a fort, they would attack soldiers and on rare occasions maybe some other group of whites.

The cost of the Indian War was causing much political trouble. The railroads, tokens of the progress in technology and culture for Americans, were obviously not really willing or able to tolerate constant attacks on their builders and passengers. They stopped and demanded that the government solve the Indian problem if they wanted the project to continue. Meanwhile, the natives wanted the invasions and attacks into their territory to stop and were really interested in something that would allow trade without wrecking the hunting grounds.

Throughout the chapter Ambrose provides detailed accounts of the delicate peace negotiations between the natives and the white man. In the end, at this stage, a compromise was reached. The Powder River War was over. The whites had been driven back and a few encroaching forts had been burned to the ground. The Crow had yielded to attacks from the East and the result was that the Sioux, especially the Oglala, had plenty of territory. Red Cloud and Crazy Horse were in a strong position to feel happy and successful in 1868-1869. Their military campaigns had gone well.



The author includes a sensitive issue that is of great importance: there is an account of Crazy Horse's special relationship with a woman named Black Buffalo Woman, a relationship that was apparently not sexual. Crazy Horse did not even pay that much attention to her, but any interest he did show was met with suspicion that he was really sexually attracted to her although she remained forever unavailable to him. Ambrose helps readers feel like part of the community in which Crazy Horse lived by sharing some of the gossip—whatever existed between Crazy Horse (who was always single) and Black Buffalo Woman (who was married to a man called No Water) has been passed down through the ages.

Meanwhile, Custer's relationship with his wife continued to thrive. He loved his work and was plagued by how much it caused him to be away from Libbie. Somehow, he enabled them to be together.



Chapters 18-20

Chapters 18-20 Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins in the year 1873. By this time, the American government has created reservations. The author has explained to readers that American policy was controlled by the whole idea of technological progress. Anything that stood in the way of progress would be destroyed or harmed. This attitude, combined with the white view that the incoming tide of immigrants was going to cause demand for occupation and use of most of the remainder of the Continent, regardless of how the Natives or Americans felt about it, caused a small number of important decisions. This is given by Stephen Ambrose as the real reason why even those who liked the natives chose "civilization" for them. Better this, the thought was, than destruction at the hands of the transformation taking place.

This summary chapter covers approximately 50 pages of the text. This includes three chapters titled: Crazy Horse and Custer on the Yellowstone; The Panic of 1873 and the Black Hills Expedition of 1874; Politics: Red and White.

The men were faced with personal matters. Part of what held the Custers together was the depth and extent of their honesty towards one another. They shared information with one another about any flirtations that transpired. Chapter 18 begins with George Custer writing his wife and keeping her informed about what is going on in his life while he is apart from her. At the same time, Crazy Horse decided to pursue Black Buffalo Woman to become his wife even though she was married to another man. No one is sure why; aside from his longstanding interest in her, the death of his friend Hump seems to have played a role in his decision.

Black Buffalo Woman did go with Crazy Horse; however, her husband turned up two nights later and defeated Crazy Horse in combat by shooting him. Crazy Horse had only a knife and none of the motivation of an angry husband. Limited chaos ensued. Peacemakers ensured that Black Buffalo Woman would not be punished in any way for either leaving with Crazy Horse nor for returning with No Water after he defeated Crazy Horse. Unlike Crazy Horse, No Water often sought protection from the white community.

Sitting Bull, the medicine man, is the new star of chapter 18, which is the real start of Part Four of the book. This man represented a different generation of Indians, ones who had to make concerted efforts to not be trapped into living on reservations. He traveled extensively amongst the white man and observed that unlike the Sioux they had not learned to pass around the extra ponies so that everyone had enough.

Stephen Ambrose gives two accounts of the same set of events thanks to letters written by two rather different men. The climate of the Great Plains suited Custer. He was nearly euphoric from the real life paradise of "Happy Hunting Grounds." The other man, Stanley, who was steady and reliable, did not like the circumstances as much. Thanks



to the comparison it was clear that both told the truth about the number of days that it rained, where they were and this sort of thing.

During the next chapter, Ambrose explains that conflict arose over the Black Hills. Miners had discovered gold ore there. The trouble was that this really was Sioux territory but American civilians had begun going after it anyways by entering the Indian preserve and endeavoring to mine there.

Conditions had changed. There were now "agencies" for the red men that were partially created by the American government. These places undermined the ability of the natives to live off the land without providing them with resources even as good as the government had intended. This made some Indians hostile in an era where some still had the choice of living freely in wild country as hunters rather than getting trapped on reservations where learning to farm was going to be a necessary change in lifestyle for the sake of survival as the area filled up with settlers.

The chapter ends after 1875. The reality of the circumstances are growing clearer. The red men of west central North America are finally facing the impending transformation of their terrain. The swarming tide of population is proving to be unstoppable and the policies that the whites are using have begun to reveal this. This shows readers how much the native experience changed and how quickly. When Crazy Horse's father was a boy, the tribes of the Plains honestly had no idea what was coming. They did not push Eastward often enough or know the Eastern tribes well enough to know what was coming. By the time the younger Crazy Horse was a grown man, what has become the American Northwest was becoming American territory, to be possessed by the endless flood of incoming Europeans.

Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary and Analysis

This is the middle section of Part 4. The author continues to tell the true life tale of two great war leaders and the events that brought them closer together. At this point both of the stars are married: Crazy Horse wed in his late twenties. Custer is still happily married to Libbie. Crazy Horse and his wife had a daughter together, but by the beginning of this chapter she has died. Ambrose reports that the events intensified his personality traits and made him a more reckless and at times a vicious warrior. The Custers still had no children but no one knows why not.

Little Bighorn Valley is mentioned here. The Indians are being forced into agencies and onto reservations more and more. The year is 1876 and the luck of the Sioux has been in decline since the preceding decade. Still, there is some escape to free, open 'wild' lands. Little Big Horn is one such location. Stephen Ambrose describes it as a "resort"—a primitive camping ground with loads of wild animals without restrictions on hunting wild game. This location and the Rosebud Valley are the main "free sites" left. There is a Sun Dance and traditional activities for the Sioux the summer of 1876. There is a sense of sorrow because the redskins know that their way of life is being destroyed, that they will not be able to do this anymore.

The Army decides to go after the free Indians who are now lumped together into a group called "the hostiles." These are the ones who feel it was worth fighting the whites—possibly even if it was a losing battle. Custer has the 7th Cavalry, but is at times forced to serve under a man named Reno. Both he and Reno are working under a three star General Crook. The General has his own column of soldiers, but he has closer to 1300 men rather than the 800 each of the others has.

Stephen Ambrose includes substantial personal details. These enhance the book for readers, especially for the more relationship and people oriented.

On June 16, 1876 Crazy Horse finds General Crook's column at the Rosebud Valley. Still out of the enemy's perception, the Sioux don their war paint but at the same time, the older men, those in early middle age, literally hem in their younger comrades to prevent strategic disaster. It does not work that well, since once the Sioux are aware that they have been pegged by Crow scouts working with the other enemy; the younger men break through the restraining line of older men and give chase. The battle of Rosebud is thus begun.

Jack Red Cloud, it turns out, is made a mockery of by the Crows. He is more boy than man at this time and unlike the hard warriors of the older generation. After surviving the humiliation, he turns into an agency Indian with a hybrid name.



The author includes a battle the natives called "Where the Girl Saved Her Brother." A woman turns up at the battle. Her name is Buffalo Calf Road Woman. Her brother is Comes-in-Sight. She has followed her brother there. While there is no account of whether or not she kills any enemies she manages to rescue her brother when he is cut off from the other troops by the enemy.

Ambrose informs readers of the worst mistake Custer ever makes. He cites the first mistake as the time his desire to reunite with his wife caused him to drag an entire military column along a bizarre and otherwise useless rushed, hard march. That had come as a result of General Sherman's orders as a protracted punishment for being against "negro men's suffrage." This worse error was that he refused a 30% increase in his fighting force. A man called Terry offers Custer a sizable segment of the 2nd cavalry, but he refuses.

The Sioux have managed to assemble the largest number of troops for a battle ever in late June of 1876 at the Little Bighorn Valley. The scouts have discovered this and warn Custer of this fact—including a reminder from someone who had lived on the Plains for 30 years. Custer had 611 men in his column. Stephen Ambrose spells out to readers that the quality and quantities of the military forces on both sides meant that superior leadership was going to determine who won.

Custer divided his troops: Reno had his own section of men. Reno succeeded in getting his troops to the North end of the native village that was in the Little Bighorn Valley where there was a fabulous stream. The trouble was that by the time they were in place, they were too exhausted to fight. Crazy Horse, had sufficient energy and mobility that he was able to present himself to Reno's line of men and still to be able to do the same to Custer's front, due to the benefits of his position. The Sioux had been using scouts with incredible efficiency that day, so it was as if Custer was walking into a trap. The author has given enough information to show clearly that part of the bizarre state of affairs for Custer was that he was destroying a way of life that he at least half loved: living and hunting in the wild of the Plains was some of the best living he had ever experienced and he was out to make sure that neither his own people nor his enemies would be able to do it for much longer.

When soldiers make war, taking advantage of an opponent's weaknesses is the norm rather than the exception. Custer's overconfidence, along with the exhaustion of his own and Reno's troops fed into his loss of the Battle at Little Bighorn. The Natives had the home court advantage. They were also more rested, although they also had the additional vulnerability of having women and children, the entire amassed village, present. Crazy Horse did something unusual, flanking Custer rather than meeting the column at the front. This made a powerful difference. Ambrose explains that this was not easy to do. Custer ended up with only 225 men on the low ground, assailed by 1500 enthusiastic Sioux warriors. He and his men were "cut to pieces"; the good news is that he died honorably, was brave down to the last moment of his life and immortalized the 7th cavalry through the events of the Battle of Little Bighorn. This stands as one of the last great victories of the red men over the white during the Indian wars. Crazy Horse

had learned his enemy's ways well enough to know to effectively apply one of their maneuvers—a flanking attack was "a white man's tactic."



Chapters 23-24

Chapters 23-24 Summary and Analysis

This section of the summary is regarding sums up the last two chapters of the book. The author describes the natives as once again "lacking the killer instinct" with respect to their enemies. What he means is that, right after the events at Little Bighorn the Sioux were content to have won and to have run off their opponents. Those with the "killer instinct" would run them down to destroy them on their retreat. However, instead there were months of cheerful celebration and happy living. To his credit, Crazy Horse had figured out that he had won a battle, not an entire military campaign and that decisive as the victory appeared, the fact that his territory was surrounded by whites clearly indicated otherwise.

Generals Terry and Crook held their ground out on the frontier and refused to make any further forays to chase down "Injuns" until they had numerous reinforcements. They achieved a major political benefit when the government took control of the situation out of the hands of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and turned it over to the Army. So, while Crazy Horse and the Sioux were enjoying their new lease on life, their enemies were patiently preparing for a serious offensive and this time they were not underestimating their opponents. What had happened to Custer now had a double meaning to the other top ranking commanders—it was both a great reason for vengeance, and a call to be much more cautious about fighting the Sioux.

A man named Miles, who was to become a General himself, ended up chasing Sitting Bull throughout Montana. The author shares an astounding truth: Sitting Bull was able to write a letter, he had become literate, and place it on a stick on a well known trail and sure enough Miles came across it out there in the fields of Montana. Sitting Bull was a medicine man who achieved a mysterious kind of prominence despite not ever holding a title such as "chief" or "great warrior." When he signed his letter to Miles he signed it "friend," not "enemy."

General Crook grew extremely frustrated for the same reason that nearly all of his predecessors had: he was supposed to "go catch Indians" but everyone who knew the Plains consistently explained that this was entirely impossible unless you really developed some understanding of the people and land and, then, once you did know, it was very difficult to do. Author Ambrose explains that he complained to the agency Indians, whom Red Cloud was now leading, slandered them unjustly and stormed off.

No Water, Black Buffalo Woman's successful albeit jealous, husband, was one of 60 men to sign up as scouts to hunt down their own Crazy Horse.

Crazy Horse's wife, Black Shawl had become ill; seeing as he had already lost his one child during her youth this was certainly a real challenge. Although he was able to hold out and to resist the white men for another winter, Crazy Horse was beginning to suffer



from the melancholy of defeat. One way or another the destruction of his peoples' former lifestyle was at hand, and the oceanic influx of the white man was worse than whatever his own people had done to the Crow.

There was competition for who could get Crazy Horse to surrender to them, fueled by competing interests and desired promotions and the fact that Crazy Horse was a prestigious enemy.

Sitting Bull escaped to Canada. He had offered this option to Crazy Horse who had refused it. Crazy Horse fell under Miles and the reality that he was no longer truly independent but had been taken in and forced to submit to the Americans was no question. This event was one of two symbols of the end of The Great Sioux War in which the Powder River region was taken from the Sioux—but by Americans who would change the land rather than by other red men who would not.

There was infighting and treachery, mostly through the use of lies and jealousy and gossip—an unreliable rumor mill. Red Cloud prevented Crazy Horse from going to Washington; he demanded his own agency. The Army officers liked and admired him—he fit their image of a real Indian and told them that if he would visit Washington then they would release him to Wyoming.

There was a successful native uprising by the Nez Pierce; the Americans seduced captive tribesmen to help them by offering them the opportunity to resume at least some of the activities of their previous lives...namely, riding freely and being scouts for a war party.

Deceit plagued Crazy Horse as he strove to find a way to live the rest of his life in peace. It seems that General Crook was lied to about Crazy Horse's motivations and intentions.

Crazy Horse was killed by bayonets at a guard house when he fought hard against being locked up inside of a prison cell. His father and one of his close friends was able to be with him at his death. He died in the custody of the Americans. His death was quickly announced to a large body of people who had assembled.

The next chapter, which is the very last one, is entitled 'What Happened to the Others'. Libbie, made a success of herself as a widow. Thanks to her unwillingness to take on a new husband, she was able to be buried beside her husband even though he had died when the two were rather young. Crazy Horse was able to receive a traditional burial rite, but just barely, as natives were now so controlled by Americans that their free, normal behavior was now seen as rebellious. Custer was buried at West Point. Through sheer good fortune, the Sioux had left his body un mutilated, which could not be said of many of the others. Black Shawl, famed for having been Crazy Horse's wife, lived well until 1930. Young-Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses became a great "progressive" chief, meaning that he learned the art of negotiation reasonably well. Sitting Bull ended up shot in the back by other Indians who were "police men," but not until after he had both

starred in the Wild West Show and had helped to perpetuate the traditional Ghost Dance ritual.

Amongst the very brief listings of their fates is the story of what happened to Miles. This man grew into the next generation of great Indian fighters. He had had his first experiences with the Sioux and then moved on to combat those holding out in lands of the Southwestern region. Not to be stopped there, this man, now a General, also defeated the Spaniards in the Spanish-American War. He retired in 1903 and passed away in 1925 in Washington, D.C..

Finally, Stephen Ambrose has supplied statistics and locations for reservations. The reservations he refers to are those located in the Dakotas and Montana, where the highest native population of pure or nearly pure blooded tribal members is in the tens of thousands for some tribes, thousands for other tribes.

The book has supplied an incredible account of the lives and surrounding circumstances of both George Custer and Crazy Horse and will appeal to many. It makes an effort to show both the red and white men in fair light. The author's work contributes also to the general population's understanding of the present day reality for Native Americans and how the current situation evolved from the past.



Characters

Libbie

This is a woman who became the wife of General Custer. They met when she was relatively young. Her father was opposed to her romance with Custer. He was nothing even vaguely resembling a military General at that time.

She appears in the book many times over from quite early on. As already explained, she is a maiden in the first instance—a wisely protected daughter. Custer proves worthy mainly through his persistence in pursuing a relationship with her.

The author explains that Custer realizes that his only real chance to have her with him enough and to satiate his own possessive feelings about her is to be her husband, to have and to keep her as his wife, regularly bringing her on campaigns.

Curly also known as Crazy Horse

This is one of the two main characters of the book. During his earliest years, people called him Curly because he had unusually curly hair and a light complexion. This was rare amongst the people he was born into.

He was a healthy, normal boy, the son of a local medicine man. He grew up during an era when the encroachments of the white man were noticeable in two places: the Oregon Trail, and the East. This being the case, there were times when the white men became significant but a great deal of the time they were far from the centre of Curly's life. This was especially the case during his youth.

When Curly had his vision, he learned that he was to be a hunter and a warrior—common vocations for males of the tribe. He was very successful at both.

Crazy Horse

This is the father of the man more commonly known as Crazy Horse. He is a medicine man—this means that he doubles as the local cleric and physician. He is introduced early in the book and appears during the first 8 chapters or so fairly often.

Crazy Horse is a member of the Oglala people of the Sioux. This was one of the main subgroups within the tribes known as the Sioux. He lived on the Great Plains during the late 1700s ad 1800s. He had some exposure to white men and other tribes moving into his peoples' range of activity because they were being forced Westward, but this was nothing that the Eastern tribes had not sometimes done earlier in history. He followed traditions and when he had his vision quest, he discovered that he was to be a holy man, one of the paths open to men in his culture.



McLellan

This is the name of one of the prominent Union Army Generals under whom Custer served. Custer was very happy to serve under this man, which made a significant difference in their relationship. His name appears after the introduction of George Armstrong Custer to West Point military academy. He appears after chapter 7, and is mentioned more than once in relation to the war and with respect to his personal relationship with Custer.

Pleasanton

This General was the first to take Custer under his wing. He felt, most clearly, that the General loved him, as well as a father might love a son. This man is mentioned in chapter 10.

Red Cloud

Red Cloud is mentioned in Chapter 13 of the book. He is famed for having been able to lead the Sioux people in a massive military campaign to defend the territory against the US military. The red men had very little history with such large scale warfare. Their cultural practice was to wage small wars in the summertime, not engage in large scale, long-range campaigns. The white men encroaching on their territory made it necessary for the red men to become more sophisticated in their methods or to lose terribly. Red Cloud had the mental capacity and fighting skill to defend the terrain and to make an offensive set of battles sufficient to amount to a campaign.

Carrington

This man figures largely in the book while he was at the level of Colonel during his 40s.

The author implies that younger men in their twenties are best in combat itself, but that older men often show superior judgment and wisdom with respect to both tactics and strategies creating a kind of mutual dependence for top performance.

Carrington was in command of Fort Phil Kearny. He knew, at least after a time, how the Sioux operated. Of course he did not know everything, but compared with the Captains sent to him, he was highly knowledgeable and wise. He was a good Colonel, but unfortunately, he made the mistake of letting a too-green Captain Fetterman take control of a situation. The Fort survived but Fetterman caused 80 men to be slaughtered by the Sioux.



Fetterman

This man was a Captain under Carrington who had proven himself to be exceptionally good combat fighter during the Civil War. He did not perceive the situation with the Sioux indians correctly. He was rather naive and ignorant about them, believing he could defeat them all with 80 American soldiers, including some infantry and some cavalry. Unfortunately, he persuaded Carrington to release command to him and a Captain named Brown.

Fetterman led the 80 men into a trap laid by the Sioux, despite Carrington's warnings to him about the Sioux using just such a set of means to lure him into a place where they had the better hand. He and Captain

Brown killed each other to escape being killed by the Sioux in their largest victory ever.

Brown

Like Fetterman, this Captain appears in the book in Chapter 13. He meets his end rather badly when Fetterman manages to get Carrington, the older Colonel to relinquish control of an attack against the Sioux. They die as a direct consequence of their own errors.

Lone Bear

This was a warrior of the Sioux. He was known for going to battle but also for getting wounded. He appears in chapter 13 during the major battle between Red Cloud's Sioux forces and the government's men under Colonel Carrington. Of the two, the red men were better supplied and in a superior position. Even so, Lone Bear was one of the few who died from that battle on the Native side. The good news was that it was an honorable death and that he was with one of his best friends—Hump.

Hump

This is the name of a Sioux warrior who appears in chapter 13. He is reputed to have been a close friend of another man called Lone Bear. Little about him has been written but that he was able to be with his friend Lone Bear when Lone Bear died.



Objects/Places

Train Station

This is a location, mentioned at the beginning of the book, where Custer touches his future wife's elbow as he assists her in boarding a train. Her father chastises her for this impropriety.

Fort Phil Kearny

This was a fort built in Sioux territory that led to the drama conflict with the natives in 1866. This was during a major increase in the amount of railroad construction that was going on in the North to reach the West. The development of the railroads brought the Americans into contact with both herds of buffalo and the red men who had been living off of them.

The Fort is prominent beginning in chapter 13 of the book. There are a few major battles fought during the time that the fort was under the control of a Colonel Carrington.

Bow & Arrow

The natives were superior at the use of this type of weaponry as they began to make use of it during their childhoods. Although they were in many respects inferior to firearms, they were better in that they were quiet, equally efficient for hunting game, and far easier to manufacture with very limited means than are fire arms. Even so, they were unable to fire these devices when they were wet with the morning dew.

These come up repeatedly at numerous locations throughout the book because they were the standard weapon of the Sioux indians, so much so, that clubs or other hand-to-hand combat weapons were rarely used.

Pony

This is the much heard of stock animal large enough for humans to ride. Ponies are natural vegetarians, big enough for a human to sit on their back. They have four legs, short fur or hair and are able to run quite quickly, much faster than a man for longer periods of time even when there is a human rider. They tend to be smaller than horses but are far taller than donkeys.

These animals were imported to the Americas, but like horses, once set wild on the plains flourished in that atmosphere as a species. They were also taken in and adopted for use by the natives.



The indians learned to ride these, to catch them, to care for them and to steal them from other tribes. The ability to do this was cultivated in them from an early age.

War Club

This item is mentioned occasionally, though not often, during the book. It comes up early on because it is a part of the upbringing of boys that helps to ensure that many of them will be decent warriors and hunters.

War clubs were rarely used in battle as the bow was relied upon heavily. According to the book, the most prone to using the club were those suffering from what is called "black heartedness"—when something has not physically but emotionally poisoned or injured a person deeply, sometimes it gives them an evil twist.

Travois

This is a carrying device used by the Sioux. It is very simple. It is two poles coming off the back, often of a dog, or a pony so that large objects can be set across the poles. It comes up more than once during the book because it is a very useful device.

Coffee

This substance was of great importance to trading with the red men out in the Northwest. The Oregon Trail carried emigrants and often enough, amongst their goods was coffee.

Those whites who wanted to trade with the red men hoped to obtain their interest, and possibly their addiction, through trading of this product. It was also used to appease the natives.

It comes up early in the book and remains important.

Sugar

This is another product that was introduced to the red indians by the white settlers as they moved West.

This is one of those items known to be either addictive or just habit forming. It is partially responsible for turning some of the red men into what they themselves called "Hangs-around-forts" which means that they altered their lifestyles in order to be able to secure this item on a rather frequent basis.



War Paint

This is a form of psychological, even mystical and deeply personal method of preparation for combat by warriors amongst the red indian tribes of the Americas. It was used regularly by the Sioux and the other tribes referred to during the book. Typically, each warrior had his own. The colors available to the natives was one factor that would influence war paint design amongst tribes.

War Bonnet

This is first mentioned when Curly, who is later Crazy Horse, has his vision. All the boys have these to find their profession and direction in their adult lives. In his vision, he finds out that he is never to wear a war bonnet. A war bonnet is a special headdress that has numerous feathers.

Feather

This self-explanatory object has a special place within native culture. They were used pervasively as decoration and symbolically in more than one way. It was normal for warriors to wear at least one in the hair, but this may have only occurred after a specific feat, such as a first kill during a war party.

Shirt

Amongst the white men these were a standard issue item. However, amongst the natives these were far less common. They were also imbued with a great deal of symbolism. There is even a rank amongst the Sioux people, the men, called "shirt-wearer."

This item comes up after chapter ten when the tension mounts between the Sioux and the Americans due to the railroads, after the end of the Civil War.

Buffalo Robe

This is a special type of attire worn rather frequently by the Sioux. They provide the right amount of coverage and warmth without undue complexity. There is almost nothing restrictive about them. They were viewed highly. They are mentioned periodically throughout much of the book because at numerous points a red man goes to an event wearing a buffalo robe, a parallel to a white man wearing a uniform or a tuxedo.



Blanket

This type of item may have been acquired through trade or hand made. The distinctive feature of the Sioux blankets as they appear in the book is that men would take them with them when they went on war parties and prior to a direct assault they would often wave their blankets at the enemy.

The Sioux also used their blankets as part of a signaling system amongst their own tribe.

War Party

A war party is a group of native warriors who have banded together to head into a battle. They may attack a few people or count coup or take some ponies or some combination thereof. They are the standard unit of the red man's military. They are not strictly restricted to being of only one size.

A war party is often relatively short term in its existence, particularly as it was custom on the Great Plains for the men to go make a little war with their enemies (other natives) a few times annually, during the Summer and then be at peace.

The war party comes up very early on in the book, and is referred to later in various contexts.

Winkte

A winkte was a man who during his adolescence had a vision which clearly indicated that he was either homosexual or had unconventional needs in terms of his gender expression or both. Doubtless there was a female equivalent. This did effect the person's social standing according to Ambrose in that it prevented the person from being of high status, but they were respected at least for the most part and viewed as being special.

By halfway through the book 2 winkte are mentioned. The first was a fellow called Pretty One, the other some kind of military scout used during a major battle midway through the book.

Lodge Trail Ridge

This is an important location in Sioux country, near the Peno valley. It is still there of course, although it may be known by another name now. It comes up during the middle of the book as a location that functioned almost as a dividing line. The Sioux were well defended at and beyond one side of Lodge Trail Ridge. To the other side of it, the

Americans were able to entrench themselves into a fort which a Colonel Carrington was put in charge of at the conclusion of the America Civil War.



Themes

Native Cultures

The main Native American culture described in the book is that of the Sioux people. There were multiple types of Sioux, the Oglala and the Brule figuring most prominently. The author gives a rather fair and friendly account of the culture. Rather than either elevating or disparaging the people, he simply describes what they were like. He admits that there is still some sort of perceptual filter, and the work is certainly not like Parker's on the Iroquois where an actual native has written an insider's view of the people. Even so, Mr. Ambrose does a reasonable job of realistically and justly depicting an indigenous peoples' culture.

One fact that comes to the fore during the exposition is that the natives already had their own system of alliances and enemies before the white men ever showed up. This is something they shared with the Europeans: the white men had a complex history of enmity and conflict amongst men of their own race and so did the red men.

The Sioux figure so centrally in this dual biography that the other native cultures are less clearly presented. It is the white men who were the opponent on the Northeastern front in the 1800s. Sioux society would not have been apt to record that prior to white encroachment, the Ojibwah and the Houdensaunee (Iroquois) were probably the Eastern boundary of their lands. Of course it matters a great deal that these were the tribes of the Great Plains, rather than those of a different topography.

During the book Ambrose tells readers something about the types of clothes the Sioux wear, the professions available to the men. While the author may or may not have jumped to conclusions about the tribe's gender relations, the book is focused upon events of male rather than of female culture. Child rearing styles are also discussed at some length early in the book as this contributed to how the adults developed.

Togetherness and alone time were both valued. The temperaments of all the people were not identical. Cultural practices such as the religious-doctor, the vision quest to describe the life path for adolescents, the diet of the people, their war ways and their lifestyle practices are all described at least in brief.

The Sioux enemies are clearly marked: Crow, Shawnee, Pawnee peoples, all fellow red men, and then the white men, increasingly on the Oregon Trail and whenever they encroached Westward into Indian territory.

Stephen Ambrose shows clearly that native boys were encouraged to gain at least some knowledge of their enemies. Often enough, the mutual ignorance on the side of the Americans and the red indians was astoundingly vast. Those military officers sent to the native frontier were often the worst of the high ranking officers. Now and then there would be an exception and someone of high quality would get the position of "Colonel of



the Western frontier." Their main task was to protect settlers who were migrating from the East. The author does take the trouble to emphasize that for these men, as with the fur traders who preceded them by centuries, whether peaceful or hostile, forged more successful relationships between whites and reds when they knew each other better.

Warfare

This book is devoted to two men due to their fame as warriors. The climax of the work is a great battle in which their troops faced each other. As such, warfare is one of the most significant themes of the work. The main purposes of warfare are to protect boundaries, often territorial ones, and to gain and preserve resources.

The white men and the red men had two different systems for how they engaged in war. The comparison of the cultures helps readers understand each side better.

Both sides felt that warfare was a normal part of life and that at least some of the men in the culture needed to be prepared for this. Both agreed that the smallest unit for fighting battles included fewer than ten, often 4 for the whites, and 6 for the redskins. Both agreed that high quality combat leaders stood out and deserved to be followed. Both agreed that both honesty and deceit were legitimate means for conducting warfare. Strategy and tactics were used by both. Both cultures forced participation in fighting to some extent by so strongly encouraging it amongst the male children, but both also agreed that there were men who are not warriors and that such men can generally be left out of such activities. Some on both sides felt that it was acceptable to run down retreating opponents and destroy them. This is viewed as more effective at achieving a complete victory.

There were also many differences. The native military was loose and free form and undisciplined by the standards of the white man. They might get together a little war party a few times a year and attack the enemy. This turned out to be good for the Indians when guerilla warfare was the best way to proceed. Losses were kept to a minimum this way, which made good sense on both sides.

One major shortcoming on the part of the natives was that they were not highly organized as a collective nation. Their troops tended to be counted more by lodges, and the military leader Red Cloud had made what for the red men was an incredible move when he managed to assemble 1000 warriors and to orchestrate a military campaign without the convenience of a pre-existing establishment like that of the white man. They did not have a centralized system, but unlike the Europeans they did have an international sign language which came in handy.

The other difference between the two was that the officers white men were working were not necessarily natural alliances. The white men had the problem of forced submission within their own ranks in that whoever they were under they were to obey. The red men selected their own superior officers on a battle-by-battle basis. Of course there would come to be groups of men who would consistently fight together under



certain people. This caused the red man's military to grow up from within to some degree whereas the American military was more artificial but systematic. White men just hoped they would grow loyal to their superior officers and often enough they did while the red men knew who they fought for and were not forced to submit unnaturally to such authority.

The red men relied upon their bows and arrows with which they were adept to an extent unfathomed by the marksmen of our current world. They acquired the ability to use the fire arms that the white men brought to them. They used clubs.

Ultimately, the red man failed to beat back the white man. It is really not certain whether it would have been possible to defeat them decisively even if they had made different decisions or whether they would only have postponed the inevitable. They lost mainly because: 1) at times they underestimated the need to unite against the common foe and did not form much needed alliances; 2) they did not have a massive, highly structured inter-tribal standing military; 3) they were not versed in large scale warfare whereas their opponents were; 4) they did not run down and slaughter retreating forces anywhere nearly as much as their opposition did.

Cultural change—Unstoppable Forces

The book recounts what happens in large part due to the emigration of white men from Europe to the Americas. Politics played a significant role. Political decisions were made that permitted an outrageous volume of immigration. This policy had an effect that is still being calculated.

The book begins in the 1800s and ends with the 1900s. The work covers one generation of Sioux in greatest detail, also reveals how differently 3 generations grew up from one another.

At the beginning of the work, the Sioux people are living in their own way. There is more than one type of Sioux, but not any centralized government. There are family groups and clans and friends of warriors. There are subtle differences in ways of doing things from one band to another. There is plenty of hunting; hunting and foraging are the main methods of "financial support." Money as such, does not really exist.

By the end of the book, these same people have had their way of life and habitat taken away from them by military forces who are really symbols of hordes of humans bent on settling and farming and other activities associated with a radically different style of culture. As such, they find themselves "victims." Part of it is their own fault, for having drastically underestimated the threat of white, or American encroachment onto the Continent, and in some other respect it is not. The sheer numbers involved in the settlement of the continent were bound to overwhelm them. These people, now half trapped on reserves face something that all civilized people do: what do I do now that there is no getting away and I cannot do what worked before?

Style

Perspective

The author writes authoritatively on this subject. The author is noted to have specialized in this area. He was published for many decades in the area of political and military history.

There are numerous footnotes, showing that the author has done substantial research on the subject he is writing about. This work is a classical example of what can be done with scholarly historical research as there was no other way to create the work. Reliable accuracy is important.

Ambrose writes from a legitimate third party perspective throughout the book. He has a clear, informative written voice. The narrator is discrete, objective and insightful. It clearly comes from a white perspective but it is fair and respectful of racial differences. The note about the author at the back informs readers that he died in 2002, but left behind a living wife and five offspring. The note explains that he traveled extensively for years with his family in preparation for creating this book.

While not free from the legacy of the American-Indian wars, the author observed multiple occasions when financial errors on the part of the government worsened the conditions for the natives to an extent that may be irreparable.

Tone

The tone of the book is objective and informative. The work is descriptive and rather accurate. The tone reflects the purpose. The dual biography can serve as a textbook for history or anthropology, especially cultural anthropology, but is written for a wider audience.

The author takes the trouble to prepare readers for the second half of the book by clearly articulating essential features of Crazy Horse and George Armstrong Custer and their contexts.

Structure

The book is neatly organized into four main parts. There is supplemental information at each end. The entire package is delivered neatly and with a clear order of progression. The presentation is chronological, which although not a requisite of biography, is not uncommon.

The work begins by explaining elements of the cultural context within which each of the men was born. This is advantageous in more than one way. Those who are not students



of history will benefit greatly. During the book, the author tells readers that knowledge of history was more a part of the white man's culture than of the native cultures of the Great Plains. Those who come at the matter from either side will gain knowledge of culture. For this reason, the book could be part of an introductory course in a university.

It could also be used for a cultural comparison of tribal peoples or for a view of how American or native culture changed through history.

The author provides an account of the childhood of each man; this lends a feeling of intimacy for readers about each of them. The entire work builds up naturally from such a starting point. The author takes readers through a chronological progression.



Quotes

"The crucial difference was discipline. Custer got his men to charge because he could threaten them with something worse than the risks of the battlefield if they did not," (p. 206).

"But she hid her feelings and did as she was told," (p. 211).

"Sitting Bull: I have just one more word to say. Of course, if a man is a chief, and has authority, he should be proud, and consider himself a great man," (p. 480).

"Then Custer sent Charlie Reynolds on a dangerous ride to Laramie, Wyoming...and by the end of August 1874 the New York Tribune and other papers were carrying sensational stories about gold in the Black Hills,' (p. 379—footnote #13) [the Sioux owned the Black Hills].

"Crazy Horse meanwhile was in the biggest trouble of his life," (p. 338).

"The night before the lovers ran away..." (p. 339).

"Spring came late to the Powder River country in 1867, but when it burst forth it was glorious," (p. 275).

"Red Cloud was the highest ranking military officer, backed up by his shirt-wearers, including Crazy Horse," (p. 275).

"Whether right or wrong, those railroads will be built," (p. 275).

"So confident had Sherman been that the Indians would not resist the building of the fort that he had urged officers to bring their wives along, and most of them did," (p. 233).

"Custer made her as comfortable as he could in a tent...Then he turned his attention back to making war," (p. 192).

"The enlisted men hated all the staff officers," (p. 178).

"The girls had little basis for making a choice because courtship among the Sioux was highly restricted...The two sexes seldom did anything together. The girls were always chaperoned by older women," (p.138).

"This arrangement neatly solved the problem of elopement, which usually came when a girl was being pressured to marry someone she did not want to live with," (p. 139).



Topics for Discussion

Recount how George Custer earned his promotion from Lieutenant to Captain. Explain why his actions were worthy of this field promotion in your own words.

Crazy Horse was the name of two men, a father and son. Early in the book, the son has a nickname. Then they switch, so that the son uses this name but the father no longer does. What do you think of this?

Who was Libbie Custer and why does she matter in this book?

Explain why it would be helpful for boys and men to get to know their enemies. Observe that this has been the case both with the red men and amongst the white men, giving examples.

Give your own opinion about the idea of warring with joy. This is what the author claims Custer could do; he did not hate his enemies and opponents. It is also true that his affection for them did not inhibit him from fighting against them. Discuss.

Compare the red man and his intuitions to the white man and his structured discipline. Which do you like better?

Which of the battles in this book, other than Little Big Horn, holds the most meaning for you and why?

Tell whether or not you think that anything could have been done to prevent Captain Fetterman from getting his soldiers killed by the Sioux, other than to remain under Carrington's command. Explain your answer.

Name 5 tricks used by the Sioux in war. Tell where they are located in the text.

Discuss war paint for individual men and for the pony. Do you approve of war paint on ponies? Why or why not?