



Sitting Bull

Bill Yenne

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"Yenne's book excels as a study of leadership."—The New Yorker

"Combining sound historiography and singular eloquence, versatile American historian Yenne provides a biography of the great Lakota leader in which care is taken to describe sources (a great deal of them are in oral tradition) and to achieve balance with compassion. A warrior as a young man, Sitting Bull was later more of a shaman and tribal elder. During the Little Big Horn, he was in camp making sure the children were safely concealed. He was a firm friend of Buffalo Bill Cody, who made him a celebrity, and was shot to death while being arrested by Indian policemen during the Ghost Dance rebellion, shortly before Wounded Knee. Yenne hails from Lakota territory in Montana and uses his familiarity with it to complement the richness of data in the narrative with an extraordinary sense of place. Indispensable to Native American studies."—Booklist (American Library Association):

"In this stirring biography, Yenne captures the extraordinary life of Plains Indian leader Sitting Bull while providing new insight into the nomadic culture of the Lakota. Born in 1831, Sitting Bull witnessed the downfall of his people's way of life nearly from start to finish—despite some clashes, "the Lakota supremacy on the northern Plains remained essentially unchallenged" until the 1850s. Yenne describes how hostilities increased after the 1849 California gold rush, and were exacerbated by the opening of the railroad; conflicts and broken treaties would harden many Lakota against the colonists, including Sitting Bull. A high point is Yenne's account of how celebrity journalism created the myth of Custer's Last Stand, casting the general as hero and Sitting Bull as the villain, and how the US cavalry's defeat was used to justify forcing Indians off their land and onto reservations. The last half of the book describes Sitting Bull's unsuccessful attempts to defend the Lakota's land and culture through negotiation and peaceful resistance, alongside a dismal record of government betrayal and neglect. In this remarkable, tragic portrait, Sitting Bull emerges as a thoughtful, passionate and very human figure."—Publisher Weekly (Starred Review)

"This is much more than the usual romantic Native American biography or sympathetic history. Instead, Bill Yenne transcends the customary Eurocentric filter and debunks the myths and romantic distortions, combining thorough literary research with contemporary Native American sources to penetrate the complex and enigmatic character of America's best-known Indian hero. And he does it all in a refreshing, engaging style." —Bill Yellowtail, Katz Endowed Chair in Native American Studies, Montana State University

"Bill Yenne has written an accessible account of Sitting Bull's life that gives us a sense of the man and his times." —Juti Winchester, Curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum

"Sitting Bull, leader of the largest Indian nation on the continent, the strongest, boldest, most stubborn opponent of European influence, was the very heart and soul of the frontier. When the true history of the New World is written, he will receive his chapter. For Sitting Bull was one of the makers of America."—Stanley Vestal

Sitting Bull's name is still the best known of any American Indian leader, but his life and legacy remain shrouded with misinformation and half-truths. Sitting Bull's life spanned the entire clash of cultures and ultimate destruction of the Plains Indian way of life. He was a powerful leader and a respected shaman, but neither fully captures the enigma of Sitting Bull. He was a good friend of Buffalo Bill and skillful negotiator with the American government, yet erroneously credited with both murdering Custer at the Little Big Horn and with being the chief instigator of the Ghost Dance movement. The reality of his life, as Bill Yenne reveals in his absorbing new...

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Nicholas Ko:

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