I am the Master of Life, whom thou desirest to know and to whom thou wouldst speak. Listen well to what I am going to say to thee and all thy red brethren. I am He who made heaven and earth, the trees, lakes, rivers, all men, and all that thou seest, and all that thou hast seen on earth. Because I have done this and because I love you, you must do what I say and leave undone what I hate. I do not like that you drink until you lose your reason, as you do; or that you fight with each other; or that you take two wives, or run after the wives of others; you do not well; I hate that. You must have but one wife, and keep her until death. When you are going to war, you juggle, join the medicine dance, and believe that I am speaking. You are mistaken, it is to Manitou to whom you speak; it is a bad spirit who whispers to you nothing but evil; and to whom you listen because you do not know me well. This land, where you live, I have made for you and not for others. How comes it that you suffer the whites on your lands? Can't you do without them? I know that those whom you call the children of your Great Father supply your wants, but if you were not bad, as you are, you would well do without them. You might live wholly as you did before you knew them. Before those whom you call your brothers came on your lands, did you not live by bow and arrow? You had no need of gun nor powder, nor the rest of their things, and nevertheless you caught animals to live and clothe yourselves with their skins, but when I saw that you went to the bad, I called back the animals into the depths of the woods, so that you had need of your brothers to have your wants supplied and cover you. You have only to become good and do what I want, and I shall send back to you the animals to live on. I do not forbid you, for all that, to suffer amongst you the children of your father. I love them, they know me and pray to me, and I give them their necessities and all that they bring to you, but as regards those who have come to trouble your country, drive them out, make war to them! I love them not, they know me not, they are my enemies and the enemies of your brothers! Send them back to the country which I made for them! There let them remain.

Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections (1886), 8:270–71.
Lone Dog's Winter Count

Like many other native societies, American Indians often have been regarded as "people without history" before Europeans arrived to record what was going on. In reality, of course, all peoples, whether literate or not, devise ways of recording their history and preserving for posterity the events that give meaning to their collective lives. In oral cultures like those of the Plains Indians, the memories of the elders served as repositories of tribal histories, and songs, stories, dances, and other public performances fastened traditions in the lives of successive generations. But Indian people also made visual records of noteworthy events: Individual warriors recorded their own heroic deeds; tribal historians compiled winter counts or calendars of events significant to the community as a whole.

Winter counts are historical records unique to the plains. Usually painted on a buffalo robe in a spiral of years, they chronicle the people's history, with each year marked by a pictographic device symbolizing a memorable event. These symbols functioned as mnemonic devices, allowing the keeper of the winter count to recall each year in full at some future date. Sometimes a single individual would compile a winter count, recording the years of his own life; at other times the winter count would be made over two or three generations or compiled by one person in consultation with elders who remembered the events or who had received knowledge of them from people long since dead.

Winter counts served the purposes of tribal historians; they are also of great value to modern ethnohistorians when used in conjunction with documentary evidence. Most plains winter counts record outbreaks of smallpox and measles and other epidemics, and most note "the winter when the stars fell," the meteor shower visible throughout the western United States in November 1833. But winter counts sometimes make no reference to things outsiders might assume would be significant. Some Sioux counts say nothing about the defeat of George Custer in 1876. Instead, the calendars contain numerous references to individual com-
not old enough to remember the earliest events; either he received the earlier records from a predecessor or gathered the traditions from the elders and worked backward, the object being "to establish some system of chronology for the use of the tribe or more probably in the first instance for the use of his own band." Lone Dog claimed that "with the counsel of the old men of his tribe, he decided upon some event or circumstance which should distinguish each year as it passed, and marked what was considered to be its appropriate symbol or device upon a buffalo robe kept for the purpose." From time to time the robe was displayed to other Indians in the tribe, "who were thus taught the meaning and use of the signs as designating the several years."4

Read from the center outward, counterclockwise, the winter count in Figure 3 provides a picture or symbol for each year of the major period of white invasion, yet whites play but a small role in this chronicle. There are seven references to trade with whites and four references to diseases introduced by whites. Twenty-four years are marked by memorable episodes of intertribal conflict, but there are no direct references to battles with whites and there is no indication of the Great Sioux Uprising in Minnesota in 1862. The selected symbols from the winter count and their interpretations are taken from the version recorded by Mallery in his report to the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology in 1888 and 1889.5

1800-01. — Thirty Dakotas were killed by Crow Indians. The device consists of thirty parallel black lines in three columns, the outer lines being united. In this chart, such black lines always signify the death of Dakotas killed by their enemies. . . .

1801-02. — Many died of smallpox. The smallpox broke out in the tribe. The device is the head and body of a man covered with red blisters. . . .

1802-03. — A Dakota stole horses with shoes on, i.e., stole them either directly from the whites or from some other Indians who had before obtained them from whites, as the Indians never shoe their horses. The device is a horseshoe.
1813-14. — The whooping-cough was very prevalent and fatal. The sign is suggestive of a blast of air coughed out by the man-figure.

1818-19. — The measles broke out and many died. . .

1821-22. — The character represents the falling to earth of a very brilliant meteor.

1823-34. — White soldiers made their first appearance in the region. So said the interpreter, Clement, but from the unanimous interpretation of others the event portrayed is the attack of the United States forces accompanied by Dakotas upon the Arikara villages. . .

1833-34. — "The stars fell," as the Indians all agreed. This was the great meteor shower observed all over the United States on the night of November 12 of that year. In this chart the moon is black and the stars are red.

1839-40. — The Dakotas killed an entire village of Snake or Shoshoni Indians. The character is the ordinary tipi pierced by arrows.

1840-41. — The Dakotas made peace with the Cheyennes. The symbol of peace is the common one of the approaching hands of two persons. The different coloration of the two hands and arms shows that they belonged to two different persons, and in fact to different tribes. The mere uncrowetual hand grasp or "shake" of friendship was not used by the Indians before it was introduced by Europeans.

1849-50. — The Crows stole a large drove of horses (it is said eight hundred) from the Brulés. The circle is a design for a camp or corral from which a number of horse-tracks are departing.

1851-52. — Peace with the Crows. Two Indians, with differing arrangement of hair, showing two tribes, are exchanging pipes for a peace smoke.

1855-56. — Gen. Harney, called by the Dakota Putniska ("white beard" or "white mustache"), made peace with a number of the tribes or bands of the Dakotas. The figure shows an officer in uniform shaking hands with an Indian.

1863-64. — Eight Dakotas were killed. Again the short, parallel black lines united by a long stroke. In this year Sitting-Bull fought General Sully in the Black Hills.

1867-68. — Many flags were given them by the Peace Commission. The flag refers to the visit of the Peace Commissioners, among whom were Generals Sherman, Terry, and other prominent military and civil officers.

1868-69. — Texas cattle were brought into the country. . .

1869-70. — An eclipse of the sun. This was the solar eclipse of August 7, 1869.

1870-71. — The Uncapas had a battle with the Crows, the former losing, it is said, 14, and killing 29 out of 30 of the latter, though nothing appears to show those numbers. The central object is not a circle denoting multitude, but an irregularly rounded object, perhaps intended for one of the
Figure 5. Trading Guns for Horses
Painted by Howling Wolf (ca. 1878-81).

Peace guaranteed the natural exchange of goods between the Cheyenne and the Kiowas. The Kiowas were skilled horse traders, and the Cheyenne sought to acquire more horses to expand their horsemanship and warfare capabilities. The image depicts a typical trade scene, illustrating the cultural exchange that occurred between these two tribes.
One Sunday morning we were busy getting ready to get to Sunday School in town. Suddenly there was great excitement among some of the boys on the floor below. One of the boys came running upstairs shouting, "Luther Standing Bear’s father is here!" Everybody ran downstairs to see my father. We had several tribes at the school now, many of whom had heard of my father, and they were anxious to see him.

When I got downstairs, my father was in the center of a large crowd of the boys, who were all shaking hands with him. I had to fight my way through to reach him. He was so glad to see me, and I was delighted to see him. But our rules were that we were not to speak the Indian language under any consideration. And here was my father, and he could not talk English!

My first act was to write a note to Captain Pratt, asking if he would permit me to speak to my father in the Sioux tongue. I said, "My father is here. Please allow me to speak to him in Indian." Captain Pratt answered, "Yes, my boy; bring your father over to my house."

This was another happy day for me. I took my father over to meet Captain Pratt, who was so glad to see him, and was very respectful to him. Father was so well dressed. He wore a gray suit, nice shoes, and a derby hat. But he wore his hair long. He looked very nice in white men’s clothes. He even sported a gold watch and chain. Captain Pratt gave father a room with Robert American Horse, in the boys’ quarters. He allowed the boys to talk to him in the Indian tongue, and that pleased the boys very much. Here father remained for a time with us.

Not all visiting parents received a reception as warm as that accorded to Standing Bear; nor did they share Standing Bear’s positive reactions. The Brulé Sioux chief, Spotted Tail, sent three sons, one daughter, and a granddaughter to the school, but when he visited Carlisle he was so appalled by what he saw that he gathered his children together, loaded them on a train, and took them home to South Dakota.¹²

WOHAW IN TWO WORLDS

Many Indian students left Carlisle and other schools without adequate training or preparation for working and living in modern American society. Nor did most Americans expect, or want, Indians to become fully participating citizens. As reformers and politicians lost faith in the Indians’ ability to be totally assimilated, they settled instead for assigning Indians to the kind of inferior status shared by other nonwhite minorities in the United States.¹³ When Indian students did return home, they did not usually fulfill their teachers’ expectations and reject their parents’ ways. Nevertheless, education in the white man’s schools and ways changed many Indian students sufficiently that they did not feel they fully belonged among their own people either. Many returning students were considered suspect by other Indians, who charged them with having become too white. Students who returned home often faced painful, and sometimes tragic, periods of readjustment and doubt about their identity. Some committed suicide; others turned to alcohol.

Wohaw, or Spotted Cow, a Kiowa Indian imprisoned in Fort Marion, produced many drawings depicting the old life he knew as a warrior-hunter as well as new scenes he witnessed as a prisoner-student. Two notebooks of Wohaw’s drawings, bought by a couple from St. Louis on their honeymoon in Florida, are now in the Missouri Historical Society. The most famous of these drawings is reproduced here (Figure 24). This symmetrical pictograph metaphorically and poignantly portrays the dilemma of a person who, like most Plains Indians in the late nineteenth century, but especially those who had been away at school, was caught between two cultures and faced an uncertain future. Wohaw depicts himself in traditional dress but identifies himself by printing his name above his head rather than employing a traditional name symbol. Under the sun, the moon, and a flaming meteor, he stands on the plains but between two worlds. On his righthand side is his Indian way of life, represented by the buffalo, tepee, and woods; on his left, the cow, church, and plowed fields represent the new way of life. He offers a pipe to both in a traditional gesture of respect and both animals blow clouds, signifying power, toward him. But his placing his foot on the farmlands and his facing the cow suggest he is being pulled toward the new way.¹⁴

Wohaw, who knew that Pratt and other like-minded whites would see his drawing, may have been deliberately ambiguous in his autobiographical sketch, suggesting that, despite being a target of Pratt’s aggressive program of assimilation, he remained a Kiowa in many ways even as he ventured down new paths.¹⁵

Other Indians who returned home from school wrestled with their dilemma in different ways. In 1890, during the time of the Ghost Dance troubles on the Pine Ridge reservation, a young Sioux by the name of Plenty Horses shot and killed an army officer. Plenty Horses was a graduate of Carlisle and, at his trial for murder, he explained his motives:
Charles Eastman, who had been educated at Dartmouth College and Boston University, was working as a doctor on Pine Ridge at the time. He tended the wounded but "lost the greater part of them." "Fully three miles from the scene of the massacre we found the body of a woman completely covered with a blanket of snow," he wrote, "and from this point on we found them scattered along as they had been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives." Most of the dead were old men, women, and children. "It took all of my nerve to keep my composure in the face of this spectacle," said Eastman; it was "a severe ordeal for one who had so lately put all his faith in the Christian love and lofty ideals of the white man." Others who had embraced "civilization" experienced similar revulsion and questioning when they saw dead babies clinging to their dead mothers' breasts. An Indian called American Horse told Mooney, "I stood very loyal to the government all through these troublesome days," but felt "a very great blame on my heart."

The Oglala holy man Black Elk, a young man at the time, responded to the massacre with fury. In his old age he reflected on how much more had ended at Wounded Knee.

BLACK ELK

Massacre at Wounded Knee

1890

It was now near the end of the Moon of Popping Trees, and I was twenty-seven years old (December, 1890). We heard that Big Foot was coming down from the Badlands with nearly four hundred people. Some of these were from Sitting Bull's band. They had run away when Sitting Bull was killed, and joined Big Foot on Good River. There were only about a hundred warriors in this band, and all the others were women and children and some old men. They were all starving and freezing, and Big Foot was so sick that they had to bring him along in a pony drag. They had all run away to hide in the Badlands, and they were coming in now because they were starving and freezing. When they crossed Smoky


Earth Knee, they followed up Medicine Root Creek to its head. Soldiers were over there looking for them. The soldiers had everything and were not freezing and starving. Near Porcupine Butte the soldiers came up to the Big Foots, and they surrendered and went along with the soldiers to Wounded Knee Creek where the Breahan store is now.

It was in the evening when we heard that the Big Foots were camped over there with the soldiers, about fifteen miles by the old road from where we were. It was the next morning (December 29, 1890) that something terrible happened.

That evening before it happened, I went in to Pine Ridge and heard these things, and while I was there, soldiers started for where the Big Foots were. These made about five hundred soldiers that were there next morning. When I saw them starting I felt that something terrible was going to happen. That night I could hardly sleep at all. I walked around most of the night.

In the morning I went out after my horses, and while I was out I heard shooting off toward the east, and I knew from the sound that it must be wagon-guns (cannon) going off. The sounds went right through my body, and I felt that something terrible would happen. . . .

[Black Elk and his companions rode toward the sound of the shooting.]

In a little while we had come to the top of the ridge where, looking to the east, you can see for the first time the monument and the burying ground on the little hill where the church is. That is where the terrible thing started. Just south of the burying ground on the little hill a deep dry gulch runs about east and west, very crooked, and it rises westward to nearly the top of the ridge where we were. It had no name, but the Wascasus sometimes call it Battle Creek now. We stopped on the ridge not far from the head of the dry gulch. Wagon guns were still going off over there on the little hill, and they were going off again where they hit along the gulch. There was much shooting down yonder, and there were many cries, and we could see cavalrymen scattered over the hills ahead of us. Cavalrymen were riding along the gulch and shooting into it, where the women and children were running away and trying to hide in the gullies and the stunted pines. . . .

By now many other Lakotas, who had heard the shooting, were coming up from Pine Ridge, and we all charged on the soldiers. They ran eastward toward where the trouble began. We followed down along the dry gulch, and what we saw was terrible. Dead and wounded women and children and little babies were scattered all along there where they had
been trying to run away. The soldiers had followed along the gulch, as they ran, and murdered them in there. Sometimes they were in heaps because they had huddled together, and some were scattered all along. Sometimes bunches of them had been killed and torn to pieces where the wagon guns hit them. I saw a little baby trying to suck its mother, but she was bloody and dead.

There were two little boys at one place in this gulch. They had guns and they had been killing soldiers all by themselves. We could see the soldiers they had killed. The boys were all alone there, and they were not hurt. These were very brave little boys.

When we drove the soldiers back, they dug themselves in, and we were not enough people to drive them out from there. In the evening they marched off up Wounded Knee Creek, and then we saw all that they had done there.

Men and women and children were heaped and scattered all over the flat at the bottom of the little hill where the soldiers had their wagon-guns, and westward up the dry gulch all the way to the high ridge, the dead women and children and babies were scattered.

When I saw this I wished that I had died too, but I was not sorry for the women and children. It was better for them to be happy in the other world, and I wanted to be there too. But before I went there I wanted to have revenge. I thought there might be a day, and we should have revenge.

After the soldiers marched away, I heard from my friend, Dog Chief, how the trouble started, and he was right there by Yellow Bird when it happened. This is the way it was:

In the morning the soldiers began to take all the guns away from the Big Foots, who were camped in the flat below the little hill where the monument and burying ground are now. The people had stacked most of their guns, and even their knives, by the tepee where Big Foot was lying sick. Soldiers were on the little hill and all around, and there were soldiers across the dry gulch to the south and over east along Wounded Knee Creek too. The people were nearly surrounded, and the wagon-guns were pointing at them.

Some had not yet given up their guns, and so the soldiers were searching all the tepees, throwing things around and poking into everything. There was a man called Yellow Bird, and he and another man were standing in front of the tepee where Big Foot was lying sick. They had white sheets around and over them, with eyeholes to look through, and they had guns under these. An officer came to search them. He took the other man's gun, and then started to take Yellow Bird's. But Yellow Bird wouldn't let go. He wrestled with the officer, and while they were wrestling, the gun went off and killed the officer. Wasichus and some others have said he meant to do this, but Dog Chief was standing right there, and he told me it was not so. As soon as the gun went off, Dog Chief told me, an officer shot and killed Big Foot who was lying sick inside the tepee.

Then suddenly nobody knew what was happening, except that the soldiers were all shooting and the wagon-guns began going off right in among the people.

Many were shot down right there. The women and children ran into the gulch and up west, dropping all the time, for the soldiers shot them as they ran. There were only about a hundred warriors and there were nearly five hundred soldiers. The warriors rushed to where they had piled their guns and knives. They fought soldiers with only their hands until they got their guns.

Dog Chief saw Yellow Bird run into a tepee with his gun, and from there he killed soldiers until the tepee caught fire. Then he died full of bullets.

It was a good winter day when all this happened. The sun was shining. But after the soldiers marched away from their dirty work, a heavy snow began to fall. The wind came up in the night. There was a big blizzard, and it grew very cold. The snow drifted deep in the crooked gulch, and it was one long grave of butchered women and children and babies, who had never done any harm and were only trying to run away... 

[Black Elk and other warriors wanted to fight the soldiers, but Red Cloud persuaded them to think of the women and children and submit.] And so it was all over.

I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.

And I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth, — you see me now a pitiful old man who has done nothing, for the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

NOTES