



## Book Review

### My People the Sioux by Luther Standing Bear

Review by: Muhammad Faiz ur Rehman

BS in Government and Public Policy, Department of Government and Public Policy, National Defence University, Islamabad.

faizjaral2001@gmail.com

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Email: faizjarral2001@gmail.com

#### **Introduction:**

My People, the Sioux is an autobiography of Luther Standing Bear of the Sioux tribe. It was first published in 1928. The book consists of episodic chapters published with certain changes in different editions. Standing Bear authored the narrative in his 60's. Throughout his life, he observed numerous important occurrences either firsthand or through his family; these accounts include certain events such as the threats by white troops following the assassination of General Custer at the Battle of Wounded Knee. He was the very first student at the notorious Carlisle Indian Boarding School. The book provides a candid glimpse at a person who was proud of his Sioux history while working hard to integrate or get along with white people. This book is a great source of information about life among the Sioux Indians in Dakota and Nebraska, as well

as a personal account of how one man battled for integration and respect as a legal American citizen.

**Main theme:**

The book is preceded by a plethora of preliminary material that establishes the time period in which the book was written, as well as the author's history and goal. He opens his book's prologue by noting that the creation of this book has not yet been with any concept of self-glory. It's merely a statement to the white race to present the Sioux people in a truthful and authentic way. The author establishes within only two phrases that he is addressing as a Sioux with direct experience of his people, and that his purpose is to tell white people appropriately about the Sioux. The author wants to tell the presumed white people about Sioux Indian practices in his book, and he does so with the viewpoint and attitude of an insider, passing on familiar experiences and facts to an outside culture.

**Review:**

“My people the Sioux” depicts the collision of two divergent civilisations, as well as one man's struggles to maneuver among them. Portions of the narrative are amusing, but others are frightening. Standing Bear has no reservations regarding expressing his viewpoint. He was trained not to worry, and he appears rather satisfied letting the audience laugh with numerous humorous anecdotes of trouble and misfortune. As he recounts his personal adventures, amazing information regarding Sioux culture surfaces

more or less by chance. Reading of Standing Bear's wedding, for example, gives white males even more reason to wish in secret that we were all Sioux warriors: "You must realise that among my people, a mother-in-law is not ever allowed to utter a single word to her son-in-law, nor even to look at him." He also said in a little humorous way that "a silent man is trusted rather than a man always ready to speak," the way he explained; it was funny in its apparent sense, but they were equally valuable because these quotes had some meaning in them

In the chapter in his book "The Tipi," he lovingly explains "our women" who "firmly resemble angels soaring" with their exposed sleeves as they worked to build the tip. He describes how the ladies of his clan were using the buffalo's hide and flesh, assuring the reader that "this was no waste, I can guarantee you". The author represents buffalo central to the social, economic and spiritual life of Sioux, which is a very symbolic and rich part of the book, it is being represented as the foundation of Sioux civilization.

As one moves through different chapters, it is understood that the author grew up in a traditional Sioux setup. He was an admired warrior and a hunter. But eventually the traditions changed, and so did the Indians. These changes were a result of not the choice but the demand and the force of white assimilation in the society. Though many battles were fought, one battle forced the change that was the Custer battle. This battle forced the Indians to adopt new ways of life. The changes that struck the Indians were not ordeals; their

independent ways of life were changed. Prized buffalo changed, so did the Indians. After many of their traditional ways were destroyed, they became more dependent on the government for their living needs, especially their food. Along with their lifestyle, their ways of traditions as well as their religion changed,

In the chapter “The Indian School”, it is stated that the US government policies for Sioux, which were white-centric, forced the Indian people to join boarding schools where they were told to pick their new names. Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle was one of the earliest boarding school whose main goal was cultural assimilation of the native American, Luther standing bear was one of the first student to arrive there, he was asked to choose his name from the wall and he selected Luther as his name, so this boarding school was good in a sense that its main task was the cultural assimilation in American natives, Luther studied from this boarding school. His thoughts and ideas were to protect that Native American culture, religion and its sovereignty. His writings educate the Native Americans, deepen the public awareness and create a well-known support to change policies toward Native American people.

In the chapter “Dance, Standing Bear explains the Sioux Religious practices, which included sacred dances. These dances were the way of expressing harmony, gratitude and humility. The US government intervened to induce cultural change and forbade the Indians from participating in their Sun Dance Ritual, which was their most significant religious and social event. The last dance Luther enjoyed

was in the summer of 1879, right before he departed for school in Carlisle. They believe that God was observing, and this dance was a holy rite. But the government sought to eradicate Indian culture completely. This was only because white people had already influenced Indian culture.

As discussed, the main essence of the book is to describe the loss of culture and its disruption. Standing Bear does not simply condemn the white people; he compares the western individualism and materialism with the Sioux values. This comparison allows the readers to ask about the dominant ideas about civilization, progress and modernity. Through his writing, it is evident that he writes in a dignified way and wants to persuade, which makes his narrative strong and builds moral authority for his critique.

Moreover, some readers would not find this book as analytically good, considering modern academic standards. The writing structure is in the form of episodes, and the chapters are self-contained reflections instead of a linear storyline. The connectivity between the chapters is only conceptual rather than connected narratively. Moving forward, the historical events are influenced by the personal memory of the author, and then are analysed through the existing documentation. This is also the speciality of this book that it explains the lived experience of the individual; in this way, the ethical and moral truth is also well written in the book, which is often missing in the statistics and the historical accounts.

### **Modern Context:**

Even though the book is an account of the historical experience of indigenous people in the United States, its wide reflections on sovereignty and power tells a story beyond its immediate context. The author says that in the case of Sioux the sovereignty eroded through administrative regulation, treaties, economic dependency and cultural assimilation. He says that these white people have this perception that they can control every aspect of the native life, even though they themselves are the outsiders in the land. My people the Sioux is the early 20th century critique of colonial expansion and control, where they take over the resources for their benefit, leaving colonies poorer. This can be related to these recent events, the United States has openly stated to acquire Greenland to gain control, it has also threatened Canada that it will make it, its 51<sup>st</sup> state. This aspect is discussed well in the book, that these early settlers asserted their control over indigenous lands with the motives of economic control in the guise of “Civilisation”. Moreover, the United States forced a large-scale operation in Caracas and captured Venezuelan President Maduro and his wife. While being accused of narco-related charges by the US, it is widely debated that this is a violation of Venezuelan sovereignty as defined by international law. Mirroring how United States initial policies eroded Sioux by controlling its sovereignty essentially its resources, land and leadership.

This book is a strong personal account of Luther Standing Bear as his experience in Sioux as a man who is navigating the clash between his culture and white assimilation into the society of the

Sioux. He reveals the challenges in very candid and humorous ways that are faced by the people due to white assimilation and the importance of protecting their traditions. His accounts aren't outdated and fit well in today's world. Bear's work is valuable to analyse the cultural struggles and events of American history that eventually shaped their identity.

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