

# Lakota woman review

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



The book, *Lakota Woman*, written by Mary Crow Dog, gave the reader a personal view of the feelings shared by most Indians living in the United States during this present day. The book dealt with the time period of Crow Dog's life along with some references to past events. Crow Dog attempted to explain the hostility felt towards the white men in the United States by the surviving Indian population. She used her own life as an example in many instances to give the reader a personal perspective.

The main point in writing this book was to present the reader with the Indian viewpoint on how they were treated and what the effects of that treatment has done to their people over the years. From the beginning of the book it becomes evident that not all Indians are the same. Mary Crow Dog's grandparents grew up during a time when the United States was trying to "civilize" the Indians by forcing them to abandon their customs in favor of a Christian lifestyle.

Most Indians took offence to that proposition, but some did not. Crow Dog's grandmother was one of the Indians who would have been termed as a successful convert. She adopted the Christian faith and was raising her grandchildren to accept Jesus in their lives. Crow Dog admitted the Jesus part sounded good, it was the beatings at the hands of the nuns and the awful food served to them at the boarding school that tainted their views of Christianity. Indians who accepted the white man's ways were called half bloods.

Crow Dog said, " The general rule is that whoever thinks, sings, acts, and speaks Indian is a skin, a full-blood, and whoever acts and thinks like a white man is a half-blood or breed, no matter how Indian he looks. " (49) This

division among their own people often created hostility and sometimes led to violence. Another problem was the rage felt inside of the warriors who were having their lifestyle taken from them. These were men who were used to hunting for their food which in turn gave them a feeling of pride. Being held on a reservation took their spirit and crushed it.

It led to heavy drinking among a large amount of the male Indian population which sometimes led to violence against women. Crow Dog suggested that these men were acting out because they could not hunt and perform their duties as Indian males. The book spoke about the different religious ceremonies and the spirituality exemplified by the Indian people. The use of the pipe along with the Willow tree tobacco, the various dances performed, and the infusion of religion in every aspect of the Indians life showed the reader how important religion is to the Indian people.

Because of that knowledge, it was appalling to read how Leonard Crow Dog's religious rights were violated and mocked in prison. The basic right of being able to freely practice a religion was denied to Crow Dog while incarcerated. The AIM, or American Indian Movement, was formed in order to bring to light the hardships faced by the Indians living in the United States and took a huge part in the Wounded Knee incident. Crow Dog was a member of that organization and married Leonard who was one of the group's leaders. Power is a theme that is seen throughout the book in various forms.

Crow Dog spoke of the power felt during certain Indian customs such as smoking the peace pipe or performing the Ghost Dance. Another form of power was seen when the doctors at the hospital took Crow Dog's sister's baby and killed it. As if that was not enough, her sister was sterilized so she

could not have any more Indian children. Crow Dog made sure that would not happen to her own child who was born at Wounded Knee. The show of force by the military at Wounded Knee was another example of the power exerted by the white men on the Indians.

The fabricated charges brought against Leonard Crow Dog which resulted in his incarceration showed the power the government held and was willing to use against the Indians. The Indian women show their own version of power by making it their duty to procreate in order to replace the population of warriors who were lost defending the cause. Another theme running through the book is anger. Not surprisingly, Crow Dog and a good majority of her people felt that something was taken from them without their permission.

Because they harbor those feelings, they believe it is ok to do things like steal from stores owned by white people. They justify their actions because they feel they are getting their revenge against the white people who stole from them. Taking Wounded Knee over and performing the Ghost Dance was a way to show the white man that they were not going to be taken advantage of any longer. They were not going to let the white men stop them from performing their sacred ceremonies and change their way of life.

The Indians took their anger against the white man and used it as fuel. Crow Dog spoke of the hardships she had to deal with living as Leonard Crow Dogs wife. Initially she was not interested in Leonard Crow Dog, but years later she found herself married to him and acting as his main support line during his incarceration. When Leonard was released from prison she described how they had to become reacquainted with each other. Life was extremely

challenging for Mary Crow Dog but she stood by her husband's side and provided the support he needed.

After being released, Mary Crow Dog would follow Leonard to various places around the country where his help was needed to bring recognition to a person or groups issue. Her life was dedicated to Leonard and together they both fought for what they believed in. For Mary Crow Dog, her life as an Indian became complete when she took part in the Ghost Dance ceremony. Crow Dog was pierced in the traditional way and experienced the visions that her ancestors had for hundreds of years. She felt that she was finally a full blooded Indian after the ceremony which symbolized that her transition was complete.

The author, Mary Crow Dog, is an Indian who has experienced the hardships of life living as an Indian under the conditions the United States Government has mandated for the Indian people. She gave the account of her life and co-authored the book along with Richard Erdoes. Crow Dog has also written *Ohitika Woman*, while Erdoes has written several books including *Lame Deer*, *Seeker of Visions*, *The Sun Dance People*, *The Rain Dance People*, *The Pueblo Indians*, and *Crying for a Dream*. Erdoes used Crow Dogs firsthand account as the basis for writing this book.

The authors accomplished their goal of bringing the reader into the world of the Indians and presenting the difficulties they faced and had overcome over the years at the hands of the United States Government. I enjoyed the book. I felt that it informed the reader of the various problems the Indians have faced over the years and how some of those problems are still being dealt with. It showed the mistreatment of the Indians by the United States

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Government. It brought the reader into the world of the Indian and made you understand why their harbor resentment and hostility along with mistrust for white people and the government.

I think this book is important for anyone who is looking to get an inside look into the bruised feelings of Indians and the reasons behind those feelings. The book provided an overview of what tribe life is like and did not hide the negatives like the drinking problems and abuse of women. Anybody who is looking for knowledge into the feelings of Indians will benefit greatly from this book.

## **Reference**

[ 1 ]. Mary Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, (New York, N. Y. , Harper Perennial 1990)