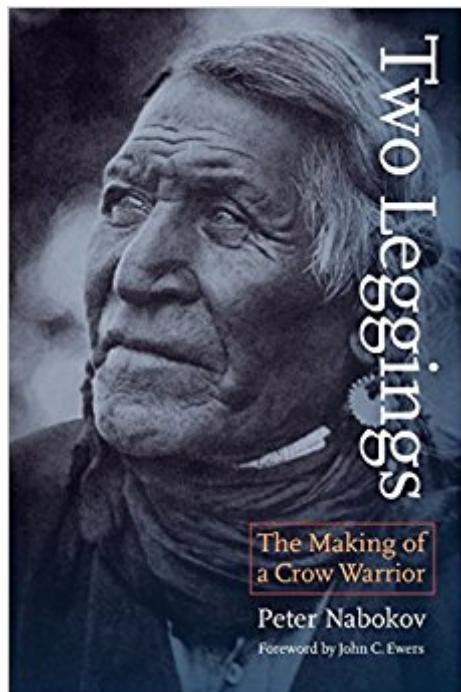


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Two Leggings: The Making Of A Crow Warrior



Synopsis

"Two Leggings . . . was one of the last Crow Warriors. From 1919 to 1923 he told his story of Crow life and wars to William Wildschut, an ethnologist with the Museum of the American Indian This is the poignant story of the end of traditional Crow life and attitudes, which Two Leggings saw ending with the last warfare rather than the death of the buffalo."-Pacific Historian Peter Nabokov is on the faculty of the Department of Anthropology and the American Indian Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the author of Native American Architecture (1988) and editor of Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian and White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-1992 (1991).

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Customer Reviews

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wife stealing between rival warrior societies. . . . It is a remarkable story."Ã¢â€”Chicago Tribune (Chicago Tribune)"This is a rare piece of AmericanaÃ¢â€”a first-person account of the psychological, religious, and social life of a nineteenth century Indian. The dramatic recital is a real contribution to our native biography, history, and ethnology, and an important treatise in a fascinating but curiously neglected field."Ã¢â€”Baltimore Sun (Baltimore Sun)

Peter A. Nabokov is on the faculty of the Department of Anthropology and the American Indian Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the author of Native American Architecture (1988) and editor of Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian and White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492Ã¢â€”œ1992 (1991).

When I toured Little Big Horn battlefield in August 2009, the tour guide noted that there have been 5000 books written on this battle and that they all contradict each other. Faced with that overwhelming variety of views, I asked her which account of the battle that she recommended. Her response was to purchase the book about Wooden Leg. Wooden Leg was a Cheyenne Indian who grew up before the destruction of the Indian way of life by encroaching whites. His memory for names and details was incredible. He gave explanations for many of the Indian names, including his own. As a runner, he seemed never to tire, so his fellows considered that his legs must be made of wood. My favorite name was Buffalo Dung. This poor fellow ended his days on earth when he was gored by a buffalo. I am sure these names suffer in translation. They seem strange to my ear, but must have seemed quite natural to the Cheyenne. Wooden Leg tells the tale of the attack on the Indian camp by Custer and his men. Actually, it was an abnormally large camp because the Cheyenne had allied with most of the tribes of the region in order to try to deal with the threat of this invasion by the blue coated cavalry. Years after the battle when the whites (who had no surviving witnesses to the battle) interviewed the Indians to learn details of this momentous event, Wooden Leg notes that many were still afraid to give a full account expecting to be punished for their part in the battle. This fact may account for many of the contradictions noted by our tour guide. Wooden Leg's account seemed quite believable due to the many details given of his own part in the battle. In spite of repeated inquiries, he was unable to give any clarification regarding what happened to Custer because he had no idea who any of the attackers were and had no understanding of rank markings on US Cavalry uniforms and could take no notice during the heat of battle. Wooden Leg noted that the elder chiefs were trying desperately to move away from the US forces and avoid battle, but the young men including Wooden Leg, were eager to engage the invaders. (I learned

from other sources that Custer was determined to invade the heart of the village to take the women and children captive. In spite of having been told by his Crow Scouts that he was hopelessly outnumbered, Custer led his men directly into the heart of the camp.) Wooden Leg observed that as the Indians moved close to a cavalry defensive position that the soldiers suddenly "went crazy" and started shooting each other! He attributed this incredible turn of events to the "strong medicine" that they had developed for the battle. Other sources noted Custer's order to his men was to save their last bullet for themselves. This book gives a rare and authentic account not only of this famous battle (the second most visited battlefield in the US after Gettysburg), but a fascinating account of the life of the plains Indians.

Great book.

Peter Nabokov reached this books for at least several years employing a friend as a helper and Guide. The education he received from the job was life changing.

In 1919, anthropologist William Wildschut, living in Billings, Montana, at the time, befriended Crow Indian chief Two Leggings, who was living along the Bighorn River. Wildschut was interested in gathering Two Leggings's reminiscences. Bringing translators with him, Wildshut met with Two Leggings at his homestead over a lengthy period of time and wrote his memoirs down. The final 480-page manuscript was deposited in the archives of the Museum of the American Indian, where Peter Nabokov discovered it. Nabokov reworked Wildschut's manuscript somewhat, usually tightening up his expansive style, and this is the result. The most striking thing about these reminiscences is how Two Leggings is not nearly as interested in Indian-white relations as he is with his raiding adventures against other tribes, especially against the Piegan. It seems his whole existence is centered on this activity. Almost equally important are his vision and dream quests; all important decisions are based on what are conjured in dreams and visions. Raiding enemy tribes, gathering coup, stealing horses - all these activities were primary to anyone wishing to be a great warrior chief. Possessing strong medicine that produced powerful visions was also important. Two Leggings relates his story up to about 1888 when the Crows were restricted to their reservation; he concludes, "Nothing happened after that. We just lived. There is nothing more to tell." His memoir is a fascinating one, and one that makes little acknowledgement of or concession to the white man's world.

This book was prepared by Nabokov from notes from interviews between the ethnographer and collector Wildschut and the aged Crow warrior Two Leggings. Those looking for a general account of plains Indian life in the mid to late 19th century may be disappointed. This book deals almost solely with Two Leggings spiritual pursuit of 'power' or 'medicine' to give him success in horse raids. And by extension status within his tribal society. The book highlights the significance of dreams to the Plains Indian and the impact they had on the real world. The book documents Two Leggings various attempts to acquire 'power' through fasting or vision quests and also gives accounts of numerous horse raids he made against his tribal enemies. The end of the days of freedom on the plains and the reservation period are largely ignored for, as far as Two Leggings was concerned, nothing of interest happened after the buffalo disappeared and horse raiding ended. All in all an excellent book which reveals how the spiritual world and warfare were so interwoven in the mind of the Plains Indian.

If you are interested in learning about spiritual power--sometimes referred to as medicine--amongst the plains Indians, then this book is for you. It discusses Two Leggings search for power through traditional vision quest and his inability to receive anything substantial. Ultimately, he receives something of value extended to him by his father-in-law. Also covered is what happens when a person makes a commitment to spirit then dishonors that commitment--the collapse and end of Sun Dance for the Crow people until it is returned years later through the Shoshone people.

This book is among my all time favorites in Native American studies. Two Leggings was not the greatest or the most famous of the Crows, but he seemed true to his culture. This gave the book the very rare feel of cultural and spiritual authenticity. Bueno.

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