

THE GENIUS OF SITTING BULL

13 HEROIC STRATEGIES FOR TODAY'S BUSINESS LEADERS

EMMETT C. MURPHY
with Michael Snell

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To Carol

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like Sitting Bull's trek to the Little Bighorn, this book grew out of a shared commitment to the values, character, and strength of American culture and the heroic leaders it *can* produce. I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who have shared this commitment with me.

First, to Michael Snell, my agent, friend, and creative partner in this endeavor, I wish to express my special thanks for the long discussions on American leadership and his willingness to help me search for the right frame of reference to propose a plan for American leadership renewal. In this regard, Michael and I owe a debt to the late historian Paul Todd, author of the best-selling American history textbook *Rise of the American Nation*, who pointed out the parallels between America's present challenge of economic uncertainty and cultural disconnection and that faced by the Sioux nation and their leader Sitting Bull. As Paul noted, if we evaluate leadership success in terms of the difficulty of the challenge and the willingness of the leader to face it, then Sitting Bull achieved as much as any leader in our country's history. He was an authentic American hero whose heroic leadership provides a model for selecting and preparing leaders today.

I also want to express my deep appreciation to members of the Lakota Sioux tribes, particularly the Hunkpapas and Oglalas, and to Barbara Booher, superintendent, and the National Park Service staff of the

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument for their gracious assistance in providing support and inspiration. In the great Sioux tradition, much of Sitting Bull's life and accomplishments have been passed down orally and still remain only sketchily documented, though some recent work, particularly by Joseph Manzione, has helped to fill this void. The lack of recorded history does not reflect a neglect in scholarship, however, as much as it supports the Sioux's desire to protect the integrity of their culture, which all too often has been abused in historical misrepresentation or exploitation. In this context, I ask their indulgence as we respectfully examine Sitting Bull's legacy, derive lessons from it, and draw parallels to contemporary American leadership.

With Sitting Bull as my model, I searched for contemporary Sitting Bulls in business and public life who have heroically accepted and continue to accept personal responsibility for the task of rebuilding our tattered culture. Their stories and Sitting Bull's merged to translate timeless principles and contemporary theory into lessons for everyday leadership practice. During the search I drew heavily on my own travels through the Great Plains of American corporate and public life during the past 25 years. Though I cannot thank all of these leaders here personally, as the sensitive nature of their stories often required the use of individual and corporate pseudonyms, I do wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to them and the following institutions and companies who contributed in special ways: American Airlines, AT&T, Bellevue Medical Center, Cambridge University, The Centers for Disease Control, Chase Manhattan Bank, Chrysler, Digital Equipment Corporation, Eligibility Services Inc., General Electric, Honeywell, IBM, Los Angeles County Medical Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The Mayo Clinic, McDonald's, NASA, Northwestern Mutual,

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I also want to express my gratitude to my children, Mark and Marissa, who took a lively interest in the subject and helped me think through what heroic American leadership means for their generation and beyond. I hope the genius of Sitting Bull and the other leaders in this book will help them in successfully facing their own Little Bighorns in the years ahead. Finally, I want to express my abiding appreciation to my wife, Carol, to whom I dedicate this effort, for her continual love and support, and to my father, Emmett C. Murphy, the first Sitting Bull in my life.

Sitting Bull . . . endowed with the courage of his convictions, of incorruptible loyalty to his people, a stickler for their treaty rights . . . the great [American] statesman. In war his bitter opponent, in peace he won my friendship and sympathy; he impressed me as a deep thinker; conscientious as to [his people's] proper rights to the lands of their fathers, he advanced arguments that were strong and convincing.

Buffalo Bill Cody

The ultimate aim of the [hero's] quest [is] neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others.

Joseph Campbell

HISTORICAL PREFACE

In 1874, gold was discovered in the Black Hills of Dakota. As the news spread, it ignited a gold rush that drew thousands of hopeful prospectors and their families to the Black Hills. Trading posts, camps, and then full-fledged settlements sprang up almost overnight in this "new territory," which had for centuries belonged to the Sioux Indians.

A treaty in 1868 had guaranteed Sioux ownership of the Black Hills. But the relentless encroachment of settlers and the violation of the federal government's treaties of convenience were rapidly destroying the Sioux culture. Chief Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapas, however, unwilling to sit by while the invaders stole his peoples' heritage and livelihood, prepared a strategic plan for the Sioux's response, commencing with a pow-wow of tribes at the Little Bighorn.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer was preparing to "deal with the Indian problem" in his own way, intending to intercept and destroy the Indian forces. A man who craved power and glory, Custer felt so confident of his ability to overwhelm and control the Sioux that he disdained extensive preparation and the support of others.

Custer undertook his personal campaign as part of a larger federal force's strategy, originally conceived as a three-pronged attack, with Generals Crook and Terry and Lt. Col. Custer leading converging columns. Terry ordered the columns to meet at the Little Bighorn River

on June 27. Custer, however, pursuing his own selfish goal of personal glory, disobeyed Terry's orders and marched his contingent to face the Sioux alone on June 25.

Following a personal agenda during the Little Bighorn campaign, Custer was driven by ego and bravado. His contempt for his enemy led him to ignore the advice of his scouts and to divide his meager troops in the face of the greatest gathering of Indian forces in western history. Custer marched forward, and within an hour of engaging the Sioux, he and all under his command were slaughtered. By the time Terry and Gibbon arrived—two days later—the Sioux had disbanded.

It was more than arrogance and bravado that destroyed Custer, however. He made the fatal error of engaging a master leader at the height of his strategic and tactical power. In the end, Custer played but a bit part in a masterfully crafted and executed leadership drama. How that drama developed, the heroic leadership it took to translate it into action, and the application of it to American leadership today is the subject of this book.

THE ROAD TO THE LITTLE BIGHORN

The following capsule summary lists the central figures and describes the critical events that led up to the Battle of the Little Bighorn. A quick perusal of this time line will give you a feeling for the flow of events and provide a reference for the story that follows.

▼ CENTRAL FIGURES

- Sitting Bull—Leader of the Sioux Nation
- Lt. Colonel George Custer—"Boy General" hero of the Civil War, Indian fighter, head of the Seventh Cavalry
- Crazy Horse—War Chief of the Oglala Sioux
- Gall—War Chief of the Hunkpapa Sioux, adopted younger brother of Sitting Bull
- Crow King—Hunkpapa Sioux Chief
- Two Moon—Chief of the Northern Cheyenne
- Brig. General Alfred H. Terry—Commander of the overall federal expedition against the Sioux, head of the Western and Eastern Columns, and Custer's commanding officer
- Brig. General George Crook—Commander of the Southern Column

- Colonel John Gibbon—Commander of the Western Column
- Major Marcus A. Reno—Custer's second in command
- Captain Frederick W. Benteen—Custer's subordinate
- Captain Thomas M. McDougall—Custer's subordinate
- Lt. General Philip H. Sheridan—Commander of the Military Division of the Missouri and mastermind of the Sioux Campaign of 1876
- Ulysses S. Grant—President of the United States
- Red Cloud—Chief of the Oglala Sioux, head of the Red Cloud Agency Reservation
- Spotted Tail—Chief of the Brulé Sioux, head of the Spotted Tail Agency Reservation

▼ THE GATHERING STORM

1865—Custer accompanies Grant to accept Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

1868—Fort Laramie Treaty with Sioux guarantees ownership of the Black Hills.

1868—Custer leads the massacre of peaceful Cheyennes at Washita Valley. Bluecoats surround and attack an unsuspecting village under cover of darkness. Although ordered to kill only warriors and to spare women and children, the Bluecoats slaughtered 103 Cheyennes, only 11 of whom were warriors.

1870—At the Piegan Blackfeet Massacre, Bluecoats attack an undefended camp; 33 men, 90 women,

and 50 children are shot to death as they run from their lodges.

1871—Citizens of Tucson and mercenary soldiers raid a peaceful Aravaipa farming community in the Camp Grant Massacre. Over 140 die, mostly women, children, and elderly.

1872—During the Battle of McClellan's Creek, Bluecoats raid a village of free Comanches, killing 23, burning 262 lodges, and capturing 120 women and children and 1,000 ponies. Indians who escape are eventually forced to join their captured families on a reservation.

1874—The Raid of Palo Duro Village turns into a massive Bluecoat attack on peaceful Kwahadis, Kiowas, Comanches, and Cheyennes. Bluecoats destroy the village and slaughter the Indians' ponies. Survivors are forced onto Fort Sill reservation.

▼ THE BLACK HILLS BETRAYAL

1874—Custer leads an expedition to confirm gold finds in the Black Hills of Dakota.

1874—The gold rush ensues. Sitting Bull leads the protest, resisting restriction to a reservation.

September 1875—Commission of Indian Affairs tries to buy the sacred Black Hills. Sitting Bull refuses to sell "even one pinch" of land.

October 1875—Government decides on new policy in which the army will no longer protect the Black Hills from prospectors.

December 1875—Commission of Indian Affairs sends an ultimatum for all Indians to report to agencies by January 31 or risk being branded hostile and driven in by the Army. The ultimatum is ignored.

▼ THE CAMPAIGN OF 1876

February 1876—The War Department authorizes General Sheridan to commence operations against “hostile Sioux.” Sheridan orders Generals Crook and Terry to begin preparations for military operations against the bands under Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Operations are to begin immediately, but only Crook can commence before winter ends.

March 1876—Custer angers President Grant by slandering the Grant administration during congressional hearings on frontier fraud.

March 1876—Grant removes Custer from command of the Seventh Cavalry; Custer begs Terry to intercede; Grant acquiesces to Terry’s request to reinstate Custer.

March 1876—Terry reinstates Custer who, a few minutes later, tells Colonel William Ludlow he will betray Terry.

March 17, 1876—Colonel Reynolds, under Crook, attacks a sleeping Cheyenne camp in the Battle at Powder River. Indians lose everything but their horses, which they steal back from the Bluecoats under cover of darkness. They then ride to join Crazy Horse.

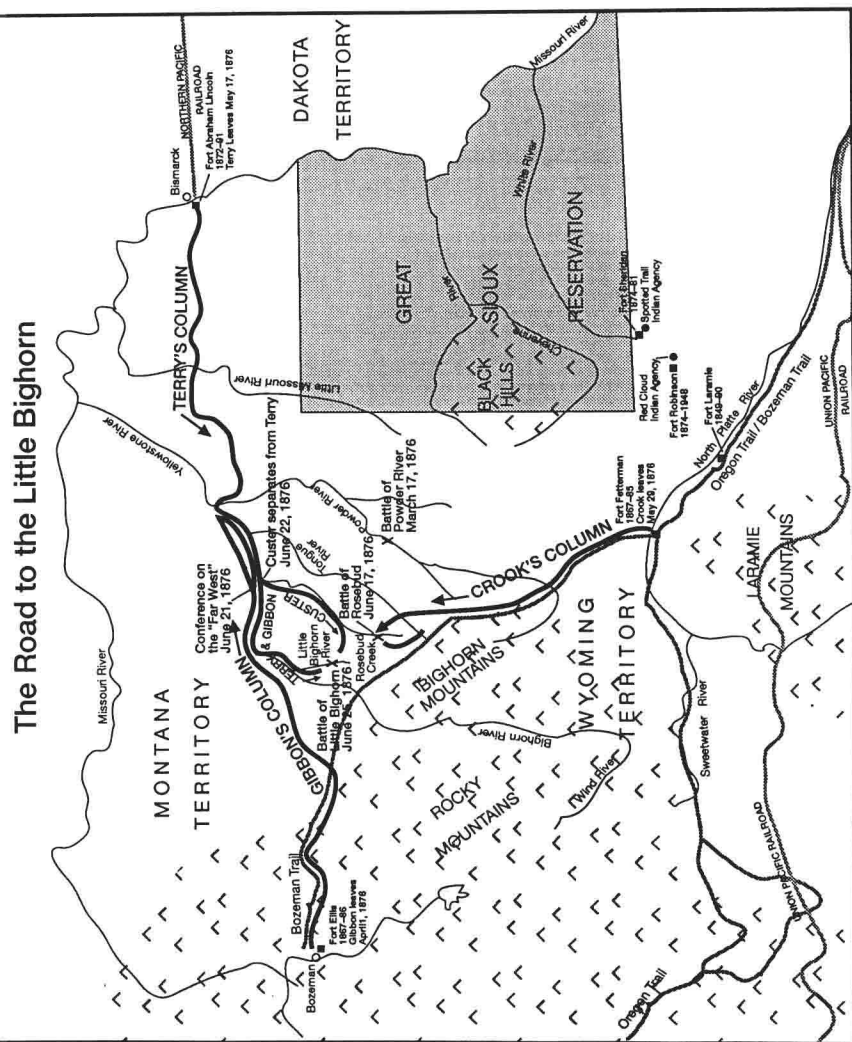
March 1876—Sitting Bull calls a powwow of all tribes on the Little Bighorn River; thousands secretly flock to his side.

May 1876—Three Bluecoat expeditions set out.

- Eastern Column: General Terry and Lt. Col. Custer from Fort Abraham Lincoln (Dakota Territory)
- Western Column: Colonel Gibbon from Fort Ellis (Montana Territory)

- Southern Column: General Crook from Fort Fetterman (Wyoming Territory)
- June 10, 1876—Reconnaissance by Major Reno of the Seventh Cavalry finds an Indian trail on the Rosebud River heading west toward the Little Bighorn.
- June 14, 1876—At the annual Sun Dance, Sitting Bull prophesies a Sioux victory over Bluecoat soldiers who will “fall into the camp.”
- June 17, 1876—Farther south on the Rosebud, Crook, with 1,300 men, is turned back by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse during the Battle of the Rosebud. Terry receives no message of this.
- June 21, 1876—An evening conference on the steamboat *Far West* on the Yellowstone convenes between Terry, Custer, and Gibbon (who had arrived with the Second Cavalry and Seventh Infantry) to plan:
- Gibbon and Terry will head west with 400 troops, arriving at the Little Bighorn Valley on June 26 or 27.
 - Custer will go south up the Rosebud with the Seventh Cavalry (600 troops) to Reno’s Indian trail, confirm the direction of the trail, and proceed to the Little Bighorn Valley, timing arrival for June 27, or at the earliest June 26. The two columns would then entrap the Indians between them.
- June 22, 1876—Custer sets out. In parting, Gibbon calls after him, “Now, Custer! Don’t be greedy! Wait for us!” “No,” Custer cryptically replies, “I won’t.” (Van de Water, p. 324)
- June 24, 1876—9:00 P.M., Custer reaches the Indian trail, disobeys Terry, and forces a night march to the Little Bighorn.

The Road to the Little Bighorn



▼ THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

June 25, 1876

- 5:00 A.M.—Custer's Crow scouts report a large village on the lower Little Bighorn River, approximately 15 miles away.
- 9:00 A.M.—Crow scouts warn Custer that Sioux warriors had detected his troops. Custer does not believe them, until similar intelligence arrives from his own troopers over an hour later.
- 11:45 A.M.—Custer begins his march to Little Bighorn Valley, 48 hours in advance of the targeted time.
- 12:15 P.M.—Custer makes first division of his regiment 15 miles from Sitting Bull's camp: Captain Benteen, with three companies (125 men), is ordered to "move to the left"; Captain McDougall will follow Benteen with all reserve ammunition, supplies, and 85 men.
- 2:35 P.M.—Custer makes a second division of the regiment 5 miles from Sitting Bull's camp. Major Reno, with three companies (140 men), is ordered to "move forward, charge the village, and we will support you" (east side of Little Bighorn).
- 2:45 P.M.—Custer departs from course and breaks to the west bank with five companies (225 men).
- 3:00 P.M.—Reno attacks on the east bank.
- 3:05 P.M.—The Sioux, led by Sitting Bull and Gall, counterattack with 500 warriors and flank Reno.
- 3:45 P.M.—Reno is forced into headlong retreat.
- 3:50 P.M.—Crazy Horse and 1,500 warriors swarm to attack Custer.