

and Sociology  
Department of Anthropology/  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver 8, B. C., Canada

Nov. 18 or so, 1967

Father Thomas Merton  
Abbey of Gethsemani  
Trappist, Kentucky

Dear Father Thomas Merton:

Forgive me, but whereas I know that Franciscans are addressed by their first names and some other orders by their last, I do not know which is proper for the Trappist order. Ping Ferry has asked me if I could send you some information about the Sioux and about Sitting Bull--or rather some references. It all happened rather roundabout--he asked my wife, because she is an anthropologist (specialty India); she volunteered me; and here I am. And glad to do it because I admire and respect you and in particular but not exclusively your anti-war activities--it is the war that finally sent me to Canada. I couldn't take it any more. But I am not a Sioux specialist. The worst of it is that there are no really hot Sioux specialists at present. Blackfoot, yes; Kiowa, yes; Comanche, yes--but don't say I said so. I don't know how far you have gone in your work. So again, forgive me if I am telling you things you already know. (I am an anthropologist whose specialty is Navajos.)

(1) The Sioux are best known as Dakota, not Sioux. Siouan is the name of a linguistic family--it's a little like calling the French "Romance"--and I am told the people we usually call the Sioux, that is the Dakota, don't like it themselves.

(2) The best short disentangling of all the various Dakota groups is Howard, in the appended bibliography, which I xeroxed.

(3) Probably Sitting Bull was a new kind of chief--but this is not at all clear. That is, probably the Dakota had hereditary headmen (not necessarily figures of great authority) until the war complex built up, as they were pushed into the Dakotas and began to push others. Then new charismatic war leaders began to emerge, and Sitting Bull was probably one of these. But I cannot give you a citation for that and it may be wrong.

(4) The anthropologists best qualified to discuss these matters are probably John C. Ewers, Gordon MacGregor, and James H. Howard. I will try to send their addresses. Of these, Ewers is the best in terms of a good understanding of pre-conquest Plains culture, but the Dakota are not his strongest area; Gordon MacGregor is good on post-conquest; Howard is an old-fashioned antiquarian anthropologist (a relatively young man), and not a good analyst--he is just "hipped" on Indians. Good on facts but not interpretation.

(5) I'll now comment on the starred items in this bibliography. Curtis is a source I haven't used, but on other tribes he has information no one else got--they are beautiful luxury volumes, ordinarily accessible only in the rare book room of a public or university library. Incidentally, there were, along with each volume, a volume of elephant folio photographs, unbound, in a folder, besides the folio-size photos in the volume itself. At worst these are "picturesque"--Indian maidens in white buckskin like White Rock Nymphs beside a pool. But at best, the portrait photos and village scenes, they are magnificent.

MacGregor, especially good on the Sioux in 1940; good short history.

Abel--along with many others put down because they deal with early accounts.

Brady--because I think it is a standard source.

Catlin because he is who he is.

Culbertson--early.

Deloria--a Sioux woman, trained by Boas.

Ewers, explained above.

Gaul, I think was important in the Standing Rock agency about the time of the Ghost Dance--but not sure.

Ewers: 4432 26th Rd., Arlington, Va. 22207  
MacGregor: 6353 Cross Woods Dr., Falls Church, Va. 22044 (also Dept. of Anthrop., American Univ., Washington DC 20016)  
Howard--can't find it.

Howard, already explained.  
Hunfreville, an early source often used.  
Hyde, not by any means always reliable, but an often-used source.  
Johnson, judging by the title.  
Johnston, same.  
Kelly, a most curious book--combines a fantastic ethnocentrism, the desire to tell a good story, and an unwilling recognition of the human qualities of her captors.  
Kroeber, because most of what he said was worth listening to.  
McGillicuddy, important.  
McLaughlin, on a guess.  
Mekeel I have found useful.  
Mooney, a classic, which I imagine you have read. A short version is now out in paper-back, but if you can get the original it is worth it. Detailed account of Sitting Bull's death, and much, much more.  
Robinson--if it is good enough to be reprinted it must be worth something.  
Ruby, the name rings a faint echo but I don't know.  
Sandoz, absolutely first class, with quite a bit about Sitting Bull in it--and Sandoz is worth pursuing further through her various works, if you haven't.  
Smith, on a guess.  
South Dakota Writers' Project, because those WPA projects often gathered valuable information.  
Spindler, for the title.  
Standing Bear because I heard vaguely it was good.  
Trudeau, early.  
Vestal--has a lot of good stuff but I am not sure that his interpretations are always sound. But the assembly of materials from all sorts of sources is unequalled. If you want to get professional evaluations, try the American Anthropologist a year or so after each book appeared, to see how it was received. Unfortunately I don't know what the original publication date for Vestal's Sitting Bull is.  
Walker, just because you need at least one description of the Sun Dance. I don't know his work.  
Welsh, unless memory fails, was an old ~~Indian~~ do-gooder for Indians--I do not wish to be sardonic, but he did some good and some well-intentioned harm. At any rate he was out there early and may have some important impressions.  
Wilson, the title.  
Wissler, a classical ethnologist, but very hard to bring to life.

Now if this seems overwhelming, I will strip it down: the musts are probably Sandoz, Mooney, and Vestal.

Meantime you may have read all this and more. I should hastily add that anthropological bibliographies like Murdock's are LOUSY on history--that, for example, working with the Indians of California, Washington, and Oregon, I found out more about contact history from Hubert Howe Bancroft's history of the US than from any anthropologist. And this, in turn, evokes the name of Bernard DeVoto--but unfortunately his work carries us no further than 1806 (Course of Empire) 1830 (Across the Wide Missouri) and 1847 (Year of Decision).

Let me know if ~~there~~ there is something else I can do. Library at U of Cincinnati or U of Kentucky ought to have Curtis.

Most sincerely,

*David F. Aberle*

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Professor of Anthropology

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