



Chief Joseph Medicine Crow

Authors Up-close Movie Transcript

Joseph Medicine Crow, interviewed on the Crow Reservation in Montana on April 20, 2005.

Program available at www.TeachingBooks.net beginning June 2005.

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I have two names. My tribal name is High Bird, meaning the eagle. And my enrollment name, as a ward of the government, is Joseph Medicine Crow.

Being Raised a Warrior

I was raised by my grandparents who were pre-reservation Indians. Grandfather prepared me to become a warrior. A warrior has got to be strong, so he put me through a vigorous physical training program: running, swimming, riding horseback and shooting the bow and arrows.

Crow Schooling

One of the most effective ways of assimilating the tribes into mainstream society was through education. The idea was to educate the Indian children to become just like white children: learn the ABCs, three R's, and so forth. By the time I was about seven years of age, every morning I would get on my little horse and ride five miles to the school — 20°–30° below, we had to go to school. Boy, that was tough.

Indian Games

Outside of school, we had our own Indian games. We'd play with our bow and arrows. We had arrows with a blunt point, and we'd shoot them into the sky. It went way up there and came down. We would run up and grab it. If you missed it, sometimes it would hit you in the head.

Counting Coup

In the old inter-tribal days, a young warrior had to complete four battlefield deeds to eventually become a chief — it was called “counting coup.” The word “coup” is a French word, from “coup d'état.”

[At the Little Bighorn National Monument, pointing at artwork depicting a Crow war scene.]

This warrior here has a stick — that's the coup stick — he's counting coup on the enemy — touching him without killing him. That's a dangerous thing to do. During World War II, I just happened to complete all four battle deeds, so they gave me the status of a Crow war chief.

Living in Two Cultures

I think I have succeeded in adopting a dual cultural system. It's interesting. Like for a tribal celebration, I'm dressed up like this, and I dance and sing. Then, the next day, I put on my suit and go lecture at a big conference some place.

I'm now 91 years of age, but I continue to live the Crow way, which is a good way of life. I want to keep on perpetuating that status. And that's why I'm interested in writing little books for children all over the world.

[Song in Crow language.]

The words go something like this, "High Bird, said you fought the Germans, that you were great warrior." So, that's my song.

Books by Joseph Medicine Crow

- COUNTING COUP: BECOMING A CROW CHIEF ON THE RESERVATION AND BEYOND (written with Herman J. Viola), National Geographic Children's Books / a division of The National Geographic Society, 2005
- FROM THE HEART OF CROW COUNTRY: THE CROW INDIANS' OWN STORIES, University of Nebraska Press, 2000
- BRAVE WOLF AND THE THUNDERBIRD (illustrated by Linda R. Martin), Abbeville Kids / a division of Abbeville Publishing Group, 1998
- LAST WARRIOR, THE, Sunset Productions, 1995

Selected Books by Herman J. Viola

- COUNTING COUP: BECOMING A CROW CHIEF ON THE RESERVATION AND BEYOND (written with Joseph Medicine Crow), National Geographic Children's Books / a division of The National Geographic Society, 2005
- FACING THE LION: GROWING UP MAASAI ON THE AFRICAN SAVANNA (written with Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton), National Geographic Children's Books / a division of The National Geographic Society, 2003
- TRAIL TO WOUNDED KNEE: THE LAST STAND OF THE PLAINS INDIANS 1860–1890, The National Geographic Society, 2003
- LITTLE BIGHORN REMEMBERED: THE UNTOLD INDIAN STORY OF CUSTER'S LAST STAND, Crown Books, 1999
- IT IS A GOOD DAY TO DIE, Crown Books, 1998
- WARRIOR ARTISTS, The National Geographic Society, 1998
- NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS, Random House Children's Books, 1996
- BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL: AN AMERICAN WARRIOR, Random House, 1993
- AFTER COLUMBUS: THE SMITHSONIAN CHRONICLE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS, Crown Books, 1990
- DIPLOMATS IN BUCKSKINS: A HISTORY OF INDIAN DELEGATIONS IN WASHINGTON CITY, University of Oklahoma Press, 1981
- INDIAN LEGACY OF CHARLES BIRD KING, THE, The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976

Many thanks to the folks at National Geographic for their help with this program, particularly Jeff Reynolds and Nancy Laties Feresten. Herman Viola has been a tremendous asset, including introducing me to Myrtle and Sherman Hubley, who were the best reservation tour guides anyone could ever ask for.

Thanks, as well, to Gretta Miller, Aarick Beher, Rich Matheson, MJ Baumann and all at Clotho Advanced Media, Inc for their invaluable, professional help with this production.

Of course, this entire Author Program occurred because of the kindness and generosity of Joseph Medicine Crow and his family. Special acknowledgements to Gloria and Ron Medicine Crow, who shared their time and energy with me in order to make this production.

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