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Preface

CANDACE S. GREENE

On a chilly morning in November 2001, I shook my husband awake at 3:30 a.m. “Come on, we don’t want to miss it.” The Leonid meteor shower was anticipated to make a particularly spectacular appearance (officially described as a meteor storm!), and 4:30–6:00 a.m. would be the peak time for our location in the mid-Atlantic region. With skies near our house obscured by tall trees and the ever-present light pollution of the metropolitan area, I had determined that we should drive out of town for prime viewing. Within minutes we were in the car speeding west, sipping hot cocoa from a thermos prepared the night before. Traveling west from Washington DC quickly takes one into the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, aptly named for the blueish haze that often enshrouds them. Avoiding low areas filled with swirling fog, we finally found a country lane that climbed to an area clear enough for good viewing of the open sky. The sight was awesome, unlike anything I had imagined. The sky was alive with streaks of light darting this way and that. Occasional clouds drifted across the sky and interrupted our view, like irritating late arrivals at the theater. By dawn we were pretty well soaked in, the show definitely over.

With some longing, I imagined what the experience would have been like where we used to live in central Oklahoma. Our house there was outside of town on a treeless wind-swept hill, and we often spent hot summer nights reclining in lawn chairs set among the tussocks of bluestem grass, watching for the occasional shooting star, swatting mosquitoes. The sky was immense and seemed very close. Little of it was obscured by trees or buildings, and since we knew nothing of astronomy, celestial events were always a serendipitous surprise. Although at some level I knew that “shooting stars” were cosmic debris burning through the earth’s atmosphere, this knowledge never reduced the sheer wonder of such rare and special moments.

Such was the sky that generations of Native people of the Great Plains experienced, and it is small wonder that it figures large in their religion and mythology. Among the tribes that kept calendars, like the Lakota, celestial

events such as eclipses and meteors were regularly chosen as markers for the years in which there were notable occurrences. In all the calendars that I have encountered, regardless of tribal origin, the winter of 1833–34 is known as “The Year the Stars Fell,” or in other translations “The Storm of Stars.” The Leonid meteor storm of that year was a spectacular one owing to the conjunction of its line of passage with the earth’s orbit, and evidently there were clear skies over much of the country. Already at work on this project, I had wanted to share that experience, in however attenuated a form. The title of this volume was inspired by that experience.

My second pilgrimage associated with this project was to the northern plains. Although I had lived in Oklahoma for many years and worked with several tribes there, I had never been to Sioux country. In the summer of 2002, Russ Thornton, Christina Burke, and I visited several reservations, discussing this project. Our goal was to let people know more about the winter counts in our collections, to find out what they were interested in, and to discuss plans for publication. We learned that many Lakota people feel a strong connection to the historic winter counts (one woman told me she had gotten her husband up at 3 a.m. to drive out to see the meteor storm), although few have been able to travel to Washington to examine them, or to find the now-rare books in which some of them have been published. Winter counts embody the voices and knowledge of their forebears, and they were enthusiastic about plans to make them more available. This book is part of an ongoing effort to make the collections of the Smithsonian’s Department of Anthropology more widely accessible, both to the communities in which they originated and to a more general audience interested in learning about other cultures.

The Lakota winter counts are a particularly important component of the Smithsonian collections. Lakota counts consisted of two linked components—the “count” itself (the list of year names and associated explanations) and the pictorial mnemonic device that supported it. Not only are our collections large, with information on many counts, but, more importantly, they include both

visual records and extensive explanatory texts provided by their original makers. All studies of other winter counts build to some extent on this foundation of information, and many studies of Lakota history have been enriched by it. Much information about the winter counts now in the National Anthropological Archives was published by Garrick Mallery in the 19th century. Periodic reprinting of those classic works attests to a continuing interest in winter counts, and this seems an appropriate time to make that information more fully and easily accessible to modern readers. The current volume includes not only the early materials that Mallery made famous but also more recent Smithsonian acquisitions, including the largely unpublished winter counts of the National Museum of the American Indian.

The collections of the National Anthropological Archives, within the National Museum of Natural History, and of its sister institution, the National Museum of the American Indian, are open by appointment to any serious student. While several hundred visiting researchers use these collections each year, this represents but a small fraction of those who would like to come but are unable to. Even for those who do study materials firsthand, the very size and complexity of the collections can make them hard to use. Preparing the winter counts for publication brought home to us very clearly the amount of work required to make sense of resources scattered among numerous boxes, files, and drawers in two museums, sorting through multiple copies and versions, however well cataloged and indexed. Even the seemingly simple question, How many winter counts do we have? turned out to be hard to answer.

This book is intended to make primary materials, both visual and verbal, easily available for study. Defining primary materials has been particularly difficult for the winter counts, and we chose to be broadly inclusive. As actively used documents, regularly handled and added to, winter counts were frequently copied onto new materials as the old ones wore out or the record outgrew the space available. All versions might be considered “copies” of previous records. Freely extending this concept, we chose

to include not only counts drawn by Native people but also replications made by others, including tracings and even photographic copies. Primary texts were similarly difficult to sort out, particularly as Mallery's notes often seem incomplete. The most original sources available have therefore been relied on: sometimes this was Mallery's published work, sometimes the notes that he received from collectors in the field, and in other instances texts recorded by unknown hands.

The opening chapter, "*Waniyetu Wówapi: An Introduction to the Lakota Winter Count Tradition*," by Christina Burke, provides general information on the place of winter counts in Lakota society and on the major collectors and scholars involved in their study. The second chapter, also by Burke, describes each of the Smithsonian winter counts, summarizes what is known of their history, and notes if there are multiple versions. The count referred to here as the Rosebud winter count is a new acquisition, not previously published. It is given special treatment by Russell Thornton in chapter 3.

These chapters provide the background for the following chapter, which makes the counts available in full, including both the pictures and accompanying texts. Rather than present each count separately, we have organized this section by year, since the greatest value in publishing this large collection as a whole seems to be in facilitating comparison among the various records. Where different counts record the same event, they enrich each other by providing different details. When they differ, they stimulate curiosity about why. An afterword by Emil Her Many Horses offers a contemporary perspective on winter counts. Through his reflections on the events referenced by each entry in his own winter count we gain a sense of the wealth of meaning that must similarly lie behind each entry in the historic counts.

In this volume we do not attempt to fully analyze the data or to smooth out the rough edges of the records by resolving any discrepancies. Winter counts were dynamic documents, passing through several filters of memory, explanation, and translation before arriving in the archives. Individual keepers could and did introduce changes, shifts

in emphasis, substitutions, perhaps even mistakes. Such differences might result from a lapse of memory, a failure in transmission from one keeper to another, or faulty translation from Lakota to written English. Often they must represent a shift in interpretation as the pictorial mnemonic or year name came to take on a new meaning in the light of new circumstances.

Although this volume focuses on the winter counts of the Lakota, the Smithsonian collections also contain materials on the calendric traditions of other Plains Indian tribes that we felt readers would want to know about. In the final chapter I provide a brief guide to related material, principally from the Kiowa but also from the Blackfeet and the Mandan.

The extensive bibliography assembled by Christina Burke was designed as a guide to the basic literature on Lakota winter counts, directing the reader beyond the materials covered in this volume.

This book results from the collaboration and support of many individuals. It began with Russ Thornton's interest in winter counts and his vision of making them more widely available to Native people. It was easy to sell me on the project, and I soon took on the logistics of organizing the many aspects of production. The Smithsonian's Repatriation Review Committee saw the dissemination of information about our collections as a worthwhile adjunct to their work. With their financial support we were able to engage Christina Burke, then a graduate student at Indiana University, in the lengthy task of locating our numerous resources and making sense of them. She drew on her own extensive research on the topic in preparing the sections she authored. Her many contacts in various Lakota communities helped us to establish an active consultation with Lakota people regarding their interests in the project. Travel to consult with Lakota people and learn their perspectives on this material was supported in part by the Getty Grant Program. In addition to supporting the idea of publishing this material in a book, many Lakota people encouraged us to make the information available online. At their urging we produced the Web exhibit *Lakota Winter Counts*, available

at <http://wintercounts.si.edu>. Information on the entries that appears there was drawn from this publication.

The original plan was to publish only the materials in the National Anthropological Archives, but we soon realized that the book would benefit from including the closely related materials in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian. A special thanks is due to Bruce Bernstein and Ann McMullen of that museum for their enthusiastic support.

Assembling and organizing the extensive visual materials presented here was a substantial task involving many people. New digital photography of all materials was provided by Will Greene (NAA) and Ernest Amoroso (NMAI). Gayle Yiotis set up the database that allowed us to synthesize images and text from many sources, and also provided services as a general research assistant. Marit Munson managed the database after the initial setup and created all the output that appears here as chapter 4. The many hundreds of carefully cropped individual images that appear in that chapter are courtesy of Gayle Yiotis and Richard Muniz and their little digital scissors. Supporting photographs from the NAA were digitized by Becky Malinsky.

The term *winter count* is an evocative one that resonates for many different people. In recent years it has appeared in new contexts and taken on extended meanings. Some Lakota people today refer to many types of old drawings as forms of winter counts that recorded individual events rather than a sequence of years. Authors have similarly extended the term, using it as a metaphor for historical narratives regarding American Indians. To cite two books recently issued by the University of Nebraska Press, Colin Calloway incorporates the term in the title of his book *One Vast Winter Count*, a sweeping account of Indian history before the time of Lewis and Clark, and Lakota writer Dallas Chief Eagle chose the title *Winter Count* for a historical novel of Lakota life set in the 19th century. The extension of the term *winter count* to widening domains suggests a growing recognition of the richness of Native sources of historical information. This volume provides information on the Lakota pictorial records that have inspired these broader associations. We are pleased to make full information about the Lakota winter counts in the Smithsonian collections more widely available.

Preface

RUSSELL THORNTON

The beginning of this project for me occurred in 1995 at the annual California Indian Conference, held that year at UCLA. I was then chair of the Smithsonian Institution Repatriation Review Committee, a congressionally mandated committee to monitor the repatriation activities of the Smithsonian whereby American Indian human remains and certain types of cultural objects held at the Smithsonian are returned to American Indian communities. I made a presentation at the conference on repatriation in general and at the Smithsonian in particular. Afterward, a young California Indian woman approached me about tribal songs that she said had been recorded and placed in a government agency in Washington DC, perhaps the Smithsonian. She wondered whether copies could be made, since the songs had been lost among her people. I told her I thought she was referring to songs made under the auspices of the WPA program during the Great Depression, and that they were not at the Smithsonian but probably at the National Archives.

This brief conversation started a long thought process for me. It was a process whereby I extended my views of repatriation to encompass not just the human remains and cultural objects mandated by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the 1989 National Museum of the American Indian Act, as amended. Not only are human remains and objects held at museums and institutions important to Indian communities, I reasoned, but so is the knowledge represented in museum and other collections and artifacts. Repatriation should really be about assisting Indian communities in gaining what they have lost, where possible.

I was still thinking about this idea when I was contacted about a newly discovered Lakota winter count, as I discuss in chapter 3. It occurred to me that it would be important to restore the knowledge represented by this winter count to the Lakota people. After all, it was a primary document of their history. As I discuss in that chapter, this winter count was eventually donated to the Smithsonian's National Anthropological Archives, through the assistance of Candace Greene. I discussed

the idea of returning this knowledge with Candace and with the members of the Smithsonian Repatriation Review Committee. All agreed that returning important knowledge to Indian communities was important, even if the physical objects in which the knowledge existed—in this instance, the actual drawings of the winter counts on cloth—were not necessarily subject to repatriation.

One thing led to another. It was eventually decided by Candace and myself that it would be important to publish the winter counts in the Smithsonian's possession in order to facilitate the transfer of the knowledge contained in them back to the people whose history is represented by them. Given the magnitude of the topic and the fact that the winter count of most interest to me was a Lakota

one, we decided to restrict our efforts to Sioux winter counts at the Smithsonian.

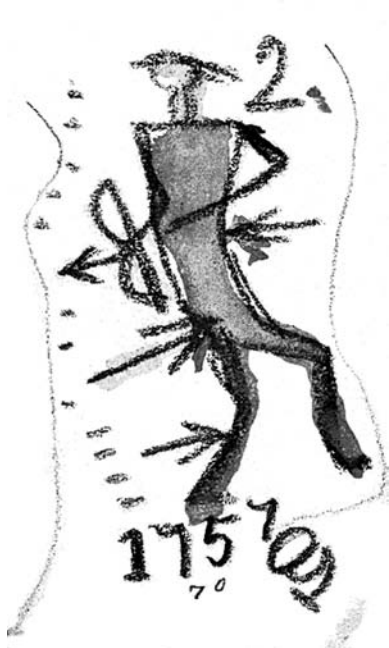
Obviously, we needed funding for the project. A proposal was eventually prepared and submitted to the repatriation review committee, requesting formal approval for our activities and some financial support. The committee was enthusiastic about the project and provided support, primarily to pay for the assistance of Christina Burke and Gayle Yiotis, whose work was eventually extremely important.

The result of my initial insight to broaden the meaning of repatriation, the support of the Repatriation Review Committee, and the efforts of Candace, Christina, Gayle, and myself is the present volume.

1

Waniyetu WówapiAN INTRODUCTION TO THE
LAKOTA WINTER COUNT TRADITION

CHRISTINA E. BURKE



The Smithsonian Institution boasts the preeminent collection of Lakota winter counts, including materials in the National Anthropological Archives (NAA) and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). These invaluable and diverse resources—pictographic calendars drawn on cloth and in sketchbooks, photographs, manuscripts, typescripts, and associated documents—include the earliest documented examples of pictographic winter counts as well as many interpretations recorded directly from the keepers of these community histories. Other relevant materials in the NAA are winter count texts listing the names of years, photographs of calendars outside the collection, and information about the creators, interpreters, and collectors of these unique resources. In addition, the NAA holds important early ethnographic and linguistic materials pertaining to the Lakota which are useful for interpreting and analyzing winter count pictographs and texts.

WINTER COUNTS: COMMUNITY HISTORIES

Winter counts are pictographic calendars in which each image represents a remarkable or unusual event of a single year. Pictographs were arranged sequentially in spirals or rows, originally on hide. Later they were drawn on cloth and paper, which became available through trade with whites, along with drawing materials such as pens, pencils, and watercolors. With these new materials and the influence of white artists like George Catlin and Karl Bodmer in the mid-1800s, the style of pictographs changed and Indians began to incorporate additional details into their images (Ewers 1957). Also, using cloth and paper as the “canvas” affected how winter counts were arranged; for instance, most counts drawn on paper are in rows across the page. Whatever the format, the most important factor was maintaining the sequence of pictographs and thus the chronology of events as they occurred.¹

The term *winter count* comes from the Lakota name for these pictographic calendars: *waniyetu wówapi*.² The first word is glossed as “winter” and refers either to the sea-

son or to the span of a year from first snow to first snow, as reckoned by the Lakota. Although seasons and lunar months were also considered meaningful units of time, calendars marked only the passing of a year. Because a Lakota “winter” encompassed the end of one Gregorian calendar year and the beginning of another, there are sometimes differences of a year or two in relating the date of a pictograph. For instance, the first event depicted on the Lone Dog winter count, the killing of 30 Lakota, may have occurred in late 1799 or early 1800. A further consideration is that the event depicted may have occurred at any time during the span of the “winter.” For these and other reasons, it is important to correlate information recorded on winter counts with other ethnographic, linguistic, and historical sources.

The second word (*wówapí*) can refer to anything that is marked and can be read or counted, from the root verb *owá*, meaning “to draw, paint, color, or mark.” The indefinite prefix *wa-* (which becomes *wo-* before *owá*) means “anything,” or even “something.” The suffix *-pi* can be either a plural or a passive marker, making the whole word “something that they mark” or “something that is marked.” The word *wówapí* is used to refer to a book, letter, flag, or anything with two-dimensional markings on it.

The images served as mnemonic devices for community members and for the winter count keeper, who was responsible for recording and remembering events. Using the calendar as his guide, the keeper could “read” the images and recite the narratives of remarkable occurrences. The earliest winter counts noted by non-Indians consisted of simple pictographic images on animal hide drawn with a bone brush dipped in vegetal and mineral paints.³ The pictographs recorded events that affected a community or band of Lakota who camped together. In general, it was only unusual or unexpected events that were documented, including natural phenomena (floods, fires, epidemics, and astronomical occurrences) and cultural events (battles, peace treaties, and the deaths of leaders).

It is believed that each band had a tribal historian who

was responsible for keeping the chronicle and its stories. In consultation with a council of elder men, he would choose a single event to mark the year that had passed (Mallery 1886:91). The winter count keeper was charged with adding it both to the calendar and to his verbal repertoire. Often winter counts covered over 100 years, more than the lifespan of one keeper. In such a case, the calendar and the responsibility for its maintenance were passed down to a male apprentice (usually a son or nephew) who would carry on the tradition of recording and reciting the band’s stories (Sandoz 1967). While an apprentice may have inherited the winter count itself, it is more likely that he created his own copy from an original kept by his mentor, since such personal effects as calendars might be buried with their owner. We do not know when such a copy was made, but probably while the elder keeper was still alive so that he could instruct the younger man on the stories each image depicted. The younger keeper then simply added new pictographs for events that occurred thereafter. Sometimes a winter count was sold to another Indian who was not a relative; the new owner then took on the responsibility of marking subsequent events (Howard 1968).

Often there were multiple copies of a winter count in a band, and more often there were closely related versions kept by bands that were closely allied. This is probably why Lone Dog, The Flame, The Swan, and Major Bush are all so similar to each other; they were collected from bands of Lakota who lived close to each other and interacted on a regular basis. By the end of the 19th century, many related winter counts were circulating throughout the northern plains. Winter count texts even appeared in *Iapi Oaye* (*The Word Carrier*), a Dakota-language newspaper published by the Presbyterian Church from 1871 to 1939. Other sociopolitical changes affected the production of winter counts. Most significantly, camps of extended families that had lived together were split into smaller family units and scattered across reservations, causing a shift in the marking of events. As the larger bands were broken up, individual families kept their own versions of the community’s winter count.

By the late 1870s, copies of winter counts were being commissioned by non-Indian collectors, serving the growing market for Indian ethnographic objects. Between 1879 and 1880, American Horse, Cloud Shield, and Battiste Good were all commissioned to make copies from original calendars that remained in their possession. Other winter counts, including *The Flame* and *The Swan*, were copied from the originals by collectors or unknown Indians. With the large number of Lone Dog copies (at least 13 in collections throughout the world), it is clear that creating such objects became something of a cottage industry, even into the 20th century.

There is no clear information about how or when Lakota people began to keep winter counts. The Lakota have undoubtedly always maintained oral traditions about their history, and at some point they began to name years for memorable events. Specialized historians were responsible for remembering the year names and associated information. In time, these historians began to make painted records to help them keep the years in their proper sequence, employing the pictorial tradition already used to record personal events. Many scholars today think that the physical objects we call winter counts were not produced until the 19th century, although they record historical traditions that are older.

Traditionally, the keeper alone was responsible for the creation and care of the winter count. At various times throughout the year he would unroll the calendar and retell the events of his people's past (Mallery 1886:91). In this way, band members learned the group's history and could use particular dates to index events in their own lives; for example, individuals determined their age by counting back to the winter they were born. Even into the 20th century, people would talk about being born in a particular winter. In the 1930s the famed Oglala medicine man Black Elk told his biographer John Neihardt that he was born in "The Winter When the Four Crows Were Killed on the Tongue River."⁴

The production of winter counts flourished between the 1870s and 1930s; of the more than 170 counts studied, most were made during this period. However, this num-

ber is somewhat misleading because many are exact copies of one other, while others are closely related versions representing the same winter count tradition or cycle (Howard 1960b; McCoy 1983). Copies were made by the keepers and their apprentices. Sometimes copies were sold to other Indians, who continued marking events, or to non-Indian collectors. In comparing individual calendars to each other, there are only seven traditions that have been documented (McCoy 1983; Walker 1982:115). Since the 1930s, only a few have been maintained. Those that were continued became more family histories than community annals, recording births and deaths of relatives and other events pertinent to a small group of people. Occasionally new winter counts are initiated (see Afterword).

RECORD KEEPING: PICTOGRAPHS, STORIES, AND TEXTS

For centuries, Plains Indians created pictographs to represent their experiences with the natural world and with the human and the supernatural, from petroglyphs chipped into stone to images drawn and painted on hide, cloth, and paper. Some scholars cite a connection between petroglyphs and painted pictographs, arguing that the latter are a continuation of the former (Rodee 1965; Keyser 1987). It is clear, though, that regardless of the format, pictographs functioned as meaningful records and not simply as aesthetic expressions of "art for art's sake." They were, and continue to be, part of the long legacy of plains oral and pictorial traditions.

Plains Indians created two basic types of pictographs: the calendric winter counts (described above) and biographical drawings that recorded the brave deeds of men, including war honors, successful hunts, and interactions with spirits experienced during visions. Such images were painted on tipis, tipi liners, clothing (robes, shirts, leggings), paper, and in ledger books (thus giving the genre its name).⁵ Like winter counts, during the 19th century these images were created by men; unlike winter counts, they recorded the activities of individual men. Most ledger

art images revolve around warfare and the continual striving for status, including scenes of battle and the capturing of horses, weapons, and other goods. Other significant activities that were recorded include hunting and courting. By the end of the 1860s, Indian men were using new materials (cloth, paper, pens, pencils, paints) and techniques (perspective, background) to also depict scenes from reservation camp life, including children's games and social and ceremonial events.⁶

Around the same time, another change in the way Lakota people documented their lives was happening as well. In the 1830s and '40s, Protestant missionaries in Minnesota developed a system for writing the Dakota dialect of the Sioux language using the Roman alphabet and diacritical marks to represent sounds not present in English (e.g., glottal stops and nasalized vowels). The Smithsonian Institution published a dictionary and grammar of Dakota by Rev. Stephen R. Riggs in 1852. Because this government publication was easily available and widely distributed, it helped support a surge in Native literacy in the late 19th century. By the 1880s Lakota people, who speak a mutually intelligible dialect with their Dakota neighbors to the east, were reading and writing their own language in personal letters, Native-language newspapers, and ethnographic notes for non-Natives like James R. Walker, the Pine Ridge agency physician from 1896 to 1914 (Walker 1982).

With the advent of literacy, men began to add written captions to drawings of their exploits and daily activities (Howard 1968). Winter count keepers sometimes added Native-language text to their pictographic calendars, writing out the names of the winters. By the end of the 19th century, some winter counts were solely texts; pictographs were replaced by written year names as the mnemonic device of choice. As mentioned above, a few such texts were published in the Native-language newspaper *Iapi Oaye* (*The Word Carrier*) (Waktegli/Kills and Comes Back 1892; Tate/Wind 1900; Lawrence 1905; Ironhawk 1936). Translation of winter count texts requires knowledge of Lakota vocabulary and grammar, and of idiomatic phrases

for things like personal names, which often defy easy interpretation. Like the earlier pictographs, the meaning of the words may not be readily apparent, and an interdisciplinary approach to translation and analysis is required.

LAKOTA LIFE ON THE NORTHERN PLAINS

The creation and use of winter counts may have begun in the mid-1800s (Mallery 1886:92; also Howard 1960b; Walker 1982:112), but it grew in the latter part of the century and then declined in the early part of the 1900s. There were probably tribal historians charged with the responsibility of remembering year events from time immemorial, but the tradition of recording them in pictographs may have developed as late as the 19th century (Ewers 1997:210). Many counts record events from the 1700s (and one, kept by John K. Bear, even marks happenings from the 1600s; see Howard 1976), but these may have begun as oral histories that were recorded in pictographs years later. We know that Battiste Good kept a winter count that originally began in the 1770s, but when the collector William Corbusier came to obtain a copy of it, Good was inspired to interview older knowledgeable Lakota who helped Good mark events beginning in 1700 (NAA Ms. 2372, Box 12).

Between the 1850s and 1950s the Lakota experienced tremendous and often devastating changes in every aspect of their lives. In the 1850s the Lakota, like other Plains Indians, were enjoying what is now referred to as the classic buffalo-hunting culture. People lived in bands of extended family groups known as *tiyošpaye*, which might include a man and his brothers and/or male cousins and their families. This band of about 150–300 people camped together year round.

In the summer, a *tiyošpaye* would move from a sheltered area out onto the open plains to join other bands in communal activities including buffalo hunts and sun dance ceremonies. The buffalo hunts provided food and materials from which people made their tipis, clothing,