

The Head  
Sioux

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May 28, 1947

Editor, Westerners Brand Book  
710 Weibolt Hall  
Northwestern University  
Chicago 11, Illinois

Dear sir:

I was very pleased to find my recent biography, JIM BRIDGER, MOUNTAIN MAN, listed among the best Western books of 1946 in your March-April issue, page 12. I don't know any bunch of men whose approval of my work could please me more than the Westerners.

While I am writing this, I should like to make a brief comment on a passage in the talk prepared by Colonel Luce. I refer to his quoting Fred Hackett about Rain-in-the-Face, on page 10. Mr. Hackett states correctly that many Sioux Indians are reluctant to touch a dead body nowadays, fear ghosts, and stay out of graveyards at night.

However, one middle-aged Sioux man took me out to a hillside near Standing Rock where a burial scaffold had stood, picked up one of the bones of a man he had known, told me his name, and offered the bone to me as a souvenir.

But in old times Sioux warriors were eager beavers to touch a dead enemy in battle and ran spirited races to see who would be first to count the coup. After the fight was over they usually stripped and often mutilated the dead, as happened at the Custer fight. There are numerous instances in which Sioux warriors, baffled in their attempts to get into the fortified villages of Rees or Mandans, vented their spite on the dead enemies lying on burial scaffolds outside the towns, pulling them down, scalping and mutilating them.

I have gone over the Custer battlefield with Indians who helped strip and mutilate the dead, and who saw Sioux women, who had lost relatives in the fight, come up and mangle some of the bodies of white troops, crying bitterly all the while.

In fact the Sioux made a custom of encouraging their boys to strike the bodies of dead enemies killed near their camp, and sometimes dragged the bodies into the camp so that toddlers could join in this manly sport. See my SITTING BULL and WARPAT for instances of these customs.