

THE STATE OF THE GREAT SIOUX, PART ONE

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Abstract

By the late 1600s, the Great Sioux had settled in what is now known as Minnesota as village farmers. As a result of conflict with other First Americans, the Sioux –then known as Dakota– began to divide and to migrate west. The result of the division was three groups –the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota. Within four decades the population of this great nation had been decimated and the nation itself had been reduced to a defeated and despondent people totally dependent on the United States for the resources necessary for its survival. This manuscript provides an historical overview of the Great Sioux, and identifies four events as critical in understanding this massive societal collapse.

INTRODUCTION

They call themselves the OYATE KIN meaning "The People." (Marshall 2004:xxiii-xxiv) They are known to whites as the Sioux, a name many of them despise. It derives from the language of one of their traditional foes –the Ojibwa– and means snake or enemy. (Coleman and Camp 1988) In the early 1800s the Great Sioux was the most powerful Indian nation in the upper Great Plains, and arguably one of the two most powerful nations in what is now the continental United States –the United States itself being the second (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Biography 1996). Yet within four decades the population of this great nation had been decimated and the nation had been reduced to a defeated and despondent people totally dependent on the United States for the resources necessary for their survival.

Four events can be identified as critical in understanding this massive societal collapse. Three of those events are reasonably well known while the fourth is not. The best known are (1) the Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn, (2) the illegal confiscation and continued occupation of the Black Hills, and (3) the Massacre at Wounded Knee. The fourth event –the one least known– is the Great Dakota Conflict, otherwise known as the Little Crow's War, The War of 1862, or The Great Sioux Uprising.

Described in this manuscript is a brief history of the Great Sioux and of the first two events instrumental in their collapse. The final two critical events and an over summary of their current status will be described in THE STATE OF THE GREAT SIOUX, Part Two.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GREAT SIOUX¹

Information on the ancestral Great Sioux prior to European contact in the mid-1600s is very limited. However, there is enough to conclude that they had lived at the headwaters of the Mississippi River in the north woods of the Mississippi Valley and later in Minnesota for several thousands of years (Gibbon 2003). They were hunters and gatherers, living in semi-permanent villages. They hunted large wild animals such as deer, elk and bison, small animals such as rabbit and beaver, and gathered wild plants such as wild rice, berries, nuts, and roots. They might have planted some crops (Coleman and Camp 1988; Gibbon 2003)

The earliest Euro-American reports concerning the Great Sioux, then known as the Dakota, are dated from the 1640s and the earliest recorded contact was in the winter of 1659-1660 (Gibbon 2003). At that time, there were as many as 20,000 Dakota who occupied a vast territory from the woodlands of central Minnesota to the prairies of the eastern Dakotas spread among dozens of villages. (Coleman and Camp 1988; Gibbon 2003)

By 1500 the Dakota had begun to divide and by the mid to late 1600s had separated into three subdivisions, becoming distinguishable by their own territory, language,

and way of life. The three were the Dakota (also known as the Isanti and later the Santee), the Nakota (also known as the Ihankton, later anglicized into Yankton), and Lakota (the Titunwan later anglicized into Teton) (Grobsmith 1981:6-7; Marshall 2004:xxiii-xxiv).

By the mid-1700s, the territory of each division was established. The Dakota occupied territory east and northeast of the Missouri River into Minnesota, the Nakota occupied territory on the Great Plains just west of the Dakota but east of the Missouri River, and Lakota occupied the Great Plains west of the Missouri River into Montana and Wyoming (Grobsmith 1981:6-7).

Taken together, the Great Sioux territory encompassed a vast area mainly including parts of seven states—Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

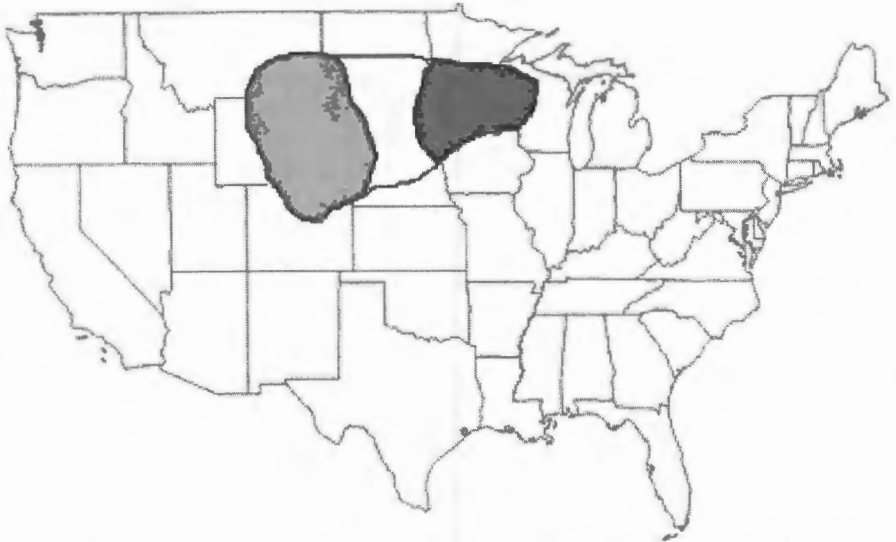
Each summer, the Great Sioux convened large encampments, bringing together all three subdivisions. These encampments provided the opportunity for large community bison hunts, feasts, sports, trade, and the celebration of important ceremonies such as the Sun Dance. This was also the time when their councils met to discuss important tribal matters such as the future scheduling of the encampment, the Sun Dance, and for consideration of war and treaties.

The Dakota

The yearly pattern of the eastern Sioux was heavily influenced by the

¹ Given the need to distinguish periodically among the three constituent parts of this society—the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota—the appellation The Great Sioux will be used.

FIGURE 1. *The Three Zones of the Great Sioux*



Legend: The western region was claimed by the Lakota, the center by the Nakota, and the eastern by the Dakota (approximately 1860).

Source: The information used in the creation of this map was taken from Gaffney (2006).

seasons. Overall, their subsistence pattern was based on hunting a variety of animals and gathering a wide variety of plants (Gibbon 2003:82-83). They fished. They hunted moose, deer, elk, and even a few buffalo, eventually adding muskrats as prey for use in the fur trade. They gathered non-cultivated plant food such as wild turnips, wild berries, chokecherries, and wild rice. In the spring, they left their winter bark-covered lodges and moved to maple-sugar and hunting camps. Since they had few horses even after the middle eighteenth century when horses became much more widely spread on

the northern plains, women and dogs transported supplies from one camp to the next. "In the summer, Dakota bands congregated in large villages along wooded river valleys, where they lived in rectangular bark-covered lodges with gabled roofs that were large enough for an extended family of a dozen or more people" (Gibbon 2003:83).

The Nakota

The middle Sioux lived most of the year in permanent villages of a few hundred inhabitants (Gibbon 2003: 83-86). Since there were few trees in the region, there were no bark

covered lodges, although there were occasional earth lodges. Instead they lived in tipis. They farmed some. Women planted corn and other vegetables in the flood plains of the rivers. A major source of food came from hunting. Yearly, there were two large scale multi-village bison hunts, one in the spring and one in the fall. Bison were hunted at other times as well, as were deer, bear, antelope, elk, and other game. The Nakota supplemented their bison hunts with fishing, gathering of uncultivated crops, and trade with the Dakota and Lakota.

The Lakota

During the early and middle part of the 1800s, the western Sioux developed into the archetype mobile, horse and bison based Plains culture (Gibbon 2003:86-92). With the adoption of the guns and horses they obtained from the Europeans, the Lakota came to depend almost entirely on the bison for virtually all of their needs (Gibbon 2003). They did, however, supplement their bison hunting with the hunting of smaller game, the gathering of wild plants such as wild onions, peas, fruits, and berries, and with trade with the Dakota and Nakota. Because they were following the bison, except in the winter they were almost always on the move, maintaining no permanent villages. Throughout the year, they lived in tipis.

As noted earlier, the Lakota participated in summer encampments with the Dakota and Nakota. It was here they engaged in important religious and social activities and in

important political discussions.

Aided by the adoption of guns and the horses, the Lakota became one of the most militarily successful of all of the Plains cultures. "The westward surge of the Western Sioux in the early nineteenth century seized territory from the Iowa, Ponca, Pawnee, Arikara, Manan, Hidatsa, Asiniboin, Kiowa, Crow, and Cheyenne" (Gibbon 2003:88). They ultimately came to dominate the upper Plains. With the increased trade they developed with white American society, they became economically successful as well. As Gibbon noted, "It was an era of unprecedented prosperity for the Lakota" (2003:90).

It is important to note that the adoption of the gun and horse by the Plains Indians had initiated an ecological catastrophe—a precipitous decline in buffalo. This decline began long before whites engaged in their relentless slaughter of the buffalo. Prior to the adoption of both the gun and horse from the Europeans, the hunting of buffalo on the Plains had been far less productive and far more difficult than after their adoption. Relatively few bison were killed in the hunts. First, hunting on foot made it very difficult to kill many buffalo. Second, given the necessity to carry the bison meat, or use dogs to carry it, the processing and transportation of a large amount of buffalo meat were difficult. The widespread adoption of the horse after about 1650 (Fagan 2000:132) and of the gun after about 1800 (Gibbon 2003:88) disrupted the prior ecological balance between the hunter and the buffalo. It

became easy and desirable to kill many buffalo quickly. The use of the horse made it easy to find the buffalo, to kill many while keeping up with the stampeding herds, and to transport the processed buffalo meat. Further, killing a buffalo was far easier with a gun than with a bow and arrow. As a consequence, the buffalo herds declined substantially (Fagan 2000:132; Lowie 1963). In terms of inter-tribal relations, the decline in the herds led to the intensification of warfare among regional groups as they fought for access to this declining resource (Gibbon 2003:88).

FOUR CRITICAL EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE GREAT SIOUX COLLAPSE

Until the early 1800s, the relationship of the United States with the Great Sioux can be characterized as benign neglect (Berg 1993, Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Fagan 2000; Gibbon 2003; Lowie 1963). There was little contact between the two nations. Few whites were in the upper Great Plains and there was little competition for resources.

As noted earlier, four events can be identified as critical in understanding the massive societal collapse of the Great Sioux. They are the Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn, the illegal confiscation and continued occupation of the Black Hills, the Massacre at Wounded Knee, and the Great Dakota Conflict.

The Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn

The amicable relationship between whites and Indians—a sort of mutual hands-off—began to fray as more and more whites migrated into Great Sioux territory (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a). By the mid-1800s, the Sioux-United States relationship had turned confrontational as the white migrants began coveting Sioux territory. That change was driven by three separate instances of the discovery of gold. The Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn was the consequence of the Sioux response to the frenetic reaction of whites to those three gold rushes.

California Gold Rush (1848)

The first gold rush occurred far from Sioux territory. When Americans heard about the gold strike in California in 1848, many decided to head west to make their fortune. However, getting to California from the eastern United States was a challenge. The Panama Canal would not be completed and opened until 1914, another 66 years. Sailing around the Cape Horn at the tip of South America was very expensive and very time consuming. A sailing ship traveling from New York to San Francisco could easily take four or more months to complete the 14,000 mile trip.

Because of the cost in money and time to sail from the east coast to California, thousands of Americans chose to travel by foot, horse, or wagon train straight across middle

America. As they migrated west, many Americans crossed Sioux territory, ignoring the fact they were crossing another nation's land. Within ten years, as many as a quarter of a million whites passed through Sioux territory (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a). They apparently considered the Great Plains untamed wilderness even though the territory had been occupied by the Sioux for generations. The Sioux, as other Plains nations, were powerless to stop the avalanche of white trespassers.

Montana Gold Rush (1862)

The second gold rush happened in 1862 in Montana. Again gold fever infected whites and they again invaded Sioux territory creating a route through the middle of prime hunting territory of the Sioux that became known as the Bozeman Trail. This time the Sioux responded violently to protect their territory. Under their leader Red Cloud, the Sioux attacked the invading whites. In response to the attacks, the U.S. Army established a series of forts along the Bozeman Trail to protect the white gold seekers (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Gibbon 2003). The Sioux, in turn, attacked the Army detachments assigned to protect the forts and killed many U.S. soldiers (Biography 1996; Josephy 1994). Army casualties mounted; in one encounter, an entire detachment of 80 soldiers led by Captain William J. Fetterman, was ambushed and annihilated (Uitley and Washburn 1977). The Sioux leader of

the successful assault on Fetterman's command was a warrior soon to become known as the Sioux nation's greatest warrior –Crazy Horse. As U.S. Army casualties mounted, Americans sued for peace. Red Cloud agreed to negotiate, but only if the U.S. Army abandoned the hated forts. It did. Within hours of their abandonment, every fort had been burned to the ground by the celebrating Sioux. In effect, Red Cloud had led the Great Sioux to victory in its war with the United States (Biography 1996; Josephy 1994).

The peace treaty Red Cloud signed –the last treaty ever signed between an Indian nation and the United States– was called the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. From the standpoint of this summary, there were two critical provisions. The first was that the Great Sioux gave up their ownership claim to all land in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, the eastern half of South Dakota, and Wyoming although they did retain the right to hunt this land.

In exchange for giving up claims to that land, the Sioux accepted the creation of the Great Sioux Reservation. It was essentially western South Dakota, a huge swath of land in South Dakota from the Missouri River to the western boundary of South Dakota (Gibbon 2003). According to the Treaty, the Great Sioux Reservation was created for “the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Indians” (Wilkins 1997:218). The Treaty guaranteed there would

be no unauthorized whites allowed within the boundaries of the Reservation. That dominion included exclusive ownership of the Black Hills – the most sacred of all Sioux land (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Marshall 2004).

The second provision was the agreement by the Sioux to give up their nomadic lifestyle, to settle in or near federally established Indian agencies within the Great Sioux Reservation, and to become farmers. As an incentive to develop a farming lifestyle, the United States agreed to provide the resources such as food, clothing, medical care, farming supplies and advice to help in the transition.

It is important to note that not all Sioux accepted the provisions of the treaty Red Cloud had signed. About two-thirds of the Lakota honored the treaty. The other one-third, led by Lakota leaders such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, neither of whom ever signed the treaty, simply ignored it (Gibbon 2003). Neither of these leaders nor their followers had any intention of abandoning the nomadic lifestyle they loved so much (Marshall 2004).

Black Hills Gold Rush

The third gold rush occurred in South Dakota only six years after the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. In 1874, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, responding to rumors of gold, led a federal expedition of 110 wagons into the Black Hills (Utley and Washburn 1977:268). He found gold and

announced its discovery to the world (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Gibbon 2003; Utley 1984; Utley and Washburn 1977).

Whites again flooded into Sioux territory. Even though the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 guaranteed that no unauthorized whites would be allowed on Great Sioux Reservation, President Ulysses S. Grant made no effort to remove the trespassing whites (Gibbon 2003). In fact, there is evidence that the Grant administration knowingly and secretly acted to encourage the violation of the treaty; "By quietly withdrawing the Army from the Black Hills, the government was signaling to interested whites that the Black Hills were open territory" (Wilkins 1997:220). Not only did President Grant not try to keep whites out of Sioux lands, he acted to protect them if they did trespass. In 1875, he threatened to withhold meat rations from the Lakota if they resorted to violence against the whites (Gibbon 2003).

The white trespassers demanded that the American government force the Sioux to sell their land (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Marshall 2004; Utley 1984). The Sioux balked. The U.S. Army then issued an ultimatum stating that all Sioux not already settled at the Indian agencies were either to come into the agencies as they had agreed to do under the provisions of the Fort Laramie Treaty or be declared as hostile and tracked down and forcibly settled at the agencies.

Those not living at the agencies simply ignored the demand consider-

ing it to be ludicrous (Biography 1996; Gibbon 2003). They refused to accept that the United States had the right to tell them they could not hunt on their own land (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Marshall 2004).

In response to the refusal of the Sioux to come to the agencies, the Army sent out numerous detachments to scour the northern Great Plains looking for them. The Sioux reacted to this military action. In early June, Sitting Bull –now considered to be their overall leader– tried to instill a sense of collective identity and pride among all Sioux –both agency and non-agency Sioux– by bringing them together at one encampment. As many as 5000 Sioux, including 600 fighting men, gathered in the Valley of the Rosebud in eastern Montana (Marshall 2004: 219).

Pursuing the Sioux was the army of General George Crook. On June 17th, the two armies engaged in the battle now known as The Rosebud Fight. Led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, and despite being outnumbered and outgunned, the Sioux with a small contingent of Sahiyela (also known as the Northern Cheyenne) fought General Crook's army to a standstill, only withdrawing from the battle when critically low on ammunition (Marshall 2004; Utley and Washburn 1977).

THE RESULTANT BATTLE

News of the successful encounter with the U.S. Army spread, and the number in the encampment swelled

to an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 including more than 2,000, perhaps as many as 3,000, warriors within a few days. It is now believed to be the largest gathering of the Sioux and Cheyenne ever assembled (Gibbon 2003:117; Marshall 2004:222 and 225; Utley 1984:178).

Searching for grazing for their horses, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse moved the encampment to the Greasy Grass Valley and camped along the Greasy Grass River, known to whites as the Little Big Horn. It was there on June 24th that the scouts from one of the detachments of General Crook's army –the Seventh Cavalry commanded by Lieutenant Colonel G.A. Custer– discovered them. Early the next morning, Lt. Colonel Custer led the Seventh Cavalry in a surprise attack against the encampment. He and 260 of his soldiers were killed. "The Battle of the Little Big Horn was the greatest of all Indian victories during the course of the Plains wars and the last great Indian military victory on the Plains (Gibbon 2003:117)."

Within eight days, the Great Sioux had had two military successes against the U.S. Army. Despite these successes, Sitting Bull could not maintain the sense of unity among the Sioux. The agency Sioux drifted away and those remaining in the large encampment splintered into several much smaller ones. "Despite the best efforts of Sitting Bull, the people scattered" (Marshall 2004: 233).

It has been suggested that the Sioux and northern Cheyenne could

not have imagined the reaction of whites to what was arguably one of the worst defeats ever suffered by the U.S. Army (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Utley 1984). After all, from the standpoint of the Sioux, they were merely defending themselves on their own land against a sneak attack by the U.S. Army.

The U.S. Army, stunned and embarrassed, reacted quickly and violently. It concentrated one-third of all of its forces against the Sioux and launched a ceaseless total war campaign against the Sioux and northern Cheyenne (Biography 1996; Gibbon 2003; Marshall 2004).” Describing the total war strategy, Gibbon states, “The goal of the strategy was to break the will of the renegades by attacking their villages when they were at their most vulnerable, in the winter. During the winter, the Lakota lived in smaller, more scattered villages and were less mobile than in the summer because of snow and cold. Warfare between Plains Indians was fought, therefore, mainly during the warmer months of the year. Sherman (the proponent of the total war strategy) aimed to destroy the shelter, food, and horses of the “renegade” Sioux, and to capture the families of fighting men. No peace was to be made with a tribe until it admitted defeat” (Gibbon 2003:115). For the next year, the U.S. Army tracked down, captured, and forced Indians bands to return to the agencies. Sitting Bull and his followers escaped to Canada (Discovery Channel Communications 1993a; Discovery Channel Communi-

cations 1993b; Marshall 2004). It was at this time that Crazy Horse decided that in order to enable his followers to survive, he would have to accept defeat. After being promised his own agency which he and his followers could locate in their Powder River hunting grounds and the resources necessary for his followers to survive, on May 6, 1887 Crazy Horse led his starving band of about 900 Lakota to Fort Robinson, Nebraska and surrendered (Gibbon 2003:117; Marshall 2004).

Four months later, after learning the promises of the U.S. Army for his own agency and for adequate supplies were not to be honored, Crazy Horse left Fort Randal. The Army sent Lakota leaders to urge him to return to Fort Randal to try to resolve the problems that had arisen between them. Knowing he could not adequately provide for his followers, Crazy Horse reluctantly agreed. When he arrived at the fort, he was told to give up his horse and his gun. He did. He then found himself pushed into a stockade to be arrested since the U.S. Army considered him dangerous. He struggled to leave the stockade. History recounts that in the struggle, there was a soldier grasping his left arm, another grasping his right and a third with a rifle equipped with a bayonet trailing behind. Seeing Crazy Horse struggle, the third soldier bayoneted Crazy Horse. He died that night (Gibbon 2003; Marshall 2004).

THE ILLEGAL CONFISCATION AND CONTINUED OCCUPATION OF THE BLACK HILLS

Eight months after the Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn, the U.S. Congress confiscated the Black Hills. In 1877, as a direct response to the defeat of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, the Agreement of 1876 was passed into law by the U.S. Congress (Wilkins 1997:221-222). The Agreement reduced the Great Sioux Reservation by almost eight million acres. Included among those eight million acres were the Lakota's Black Hills. In passing this Agreement, the U.S. Congress ignored the provisions of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 they had approved only nine years earlier which accepted the ownership of the Black Hills by the Sioux and which had promised to honor that ownership in perpetuity unless a majority of all Sioux adult males agreed to sell the Black Hills.

A century after losing their sacred Black Hills, the Sioux finally were able to present their case before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1980, in the *United States vs. Sioux Nation of Indians* Supreme Court Decision, the Supreme Court ruled in an 8-1 decision that in fact the United States had illegally appropriated the Black Hills. The Supreme Court based its decision on the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 which guaranteed that the recognized Sioux land would never be subject to purchase by treaty within the U.S. "...unless [said treaty was] executed and signed by at least three-fourths of all the adult male

Indians..." (Wilkins 1997:218). To force the Sioux to sell the Black Hills, Congress attached a rider to the 1876 Appropriations Bill which denied all further appropriations and treaty-guaranteed annuities to the Sioux unless they agreed to sell the Black Hills. Such a denial of funds was a clear violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty.

Representatives of Congress could only get ten percent of the adult Sioux males to sign the treaty despite the threat to starve them. The U.S. Congress asserted that the ten percent (rather than the three-fourths called for by the Fort Laramie Treaty) could be assumed to represent the Lakota and in 1877 took the Black Hills (U.S. Supreme Court 1980; Wilkins 1997). Clearly the provisions of the Fort Laramie Treaty had not been honored.

Further, the Supreme Court decision stated that several Constitutional provisions were violated when the government confiscated the Black Hills. The 5th Amendment clause stating that land can only be confiscated for public purpose, not to give to other people, was violated, as was the 5th Amendment clause requiring that those having their land confiscated must be given just compensation. Finally, the 14th Amendment that the confiscation must be accorded due process of law was violated (U.S. Supreme Court 1980; Wilkins 1997).

Unfortunately for the Sioux, the U.S. Supreme Court does not have the power to force the U.S. Government to return their land. It

can only require compensation and it made compensation a part of its decision. The U.S. Government has offered compensation. However, many have argued the amount offered represents only a tiny fraction of the true value of the Black Hills. At present, the amount offered is irrelevant since the Sioux have shown no interest in accepting any amount of compensation for what they believe is their most sacred territory. The case is at present unresolved.

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SHOOTING FROM THE LIP



THE LIFE OF SENATOR AL SIMPSON

Shooting from the Lip The Life of Senator Al Simpson (ISBN 9780806142111)

By: Donald Loren Hardy

Shortly before Wyoming's Alan K. Simpson was elected majority whip of the United States Senate, he decided to keep a journal. "I am going to make notes when I get home in the evening, as to what happened during each day." Now the senator's longtime chief of staff, Donald Loren Hardy, has drawn extensively on Simpson's personal papers and nineteen-volume diary to write this unvarnished account of a storied life and political career. *Shooting from the Lip* portrays a statesman punching sacred cows, challenging the media, and grappling with some of the nation's most difficult challenges.



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