

### 3c- Afterword *Dances with Wolves*

Like most children of the fifties, my first impressions of Native American people were not very positive. Indians were widely portrayed as devils, whose destruction was purely a matter of necessity in the process of taming<sup>1</sup> the West. Every publication or film I saw as a child was slanted<sup>2</sup> in this way. But from the first, I sensed somehow that the story was incomplete. Late in elementary school I read a book by Quentin Reynolds that was written for young readers. I can't remember the title, but the book was about Custer and the Seventh Cavalry and the Little Big Horn. I enjoyed it immensely and, as most boys would, I identified strongly with the white soldiers.

There was something else, however, that sparked my interest for years to come. One particular Indian was portrayed in Reynold's book as a great warrior and leader—Crazy Horse. From the moment I read about him I wanted to know more.

Perhaps it was the ring of his name or the description of his fighting spirit, but I recall distinctly that I laid the book down with the thought, I'd like to know more about that Crazy Horse.

In succeeding years, I never fully lost the desire to know more, but it wasn't until my mid-twenties that I encountered the Indian people again, the time reading Dee Brown's classic *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. I was stunned, heartbroken, and enlightened. [...] Another ten years have passed and I am still reading Native American history.

It is often a sad study of genocide, of cultural annihilation perpetrated by our forefathers<sup>3</sup> in the name of growth and of the "future generations" that we now comprise.

When I think of what was lost in the trampling<sup>4</sup> of the great horse culture and its people, I am made immeasurably sad. Here were a people living in rough perfection; at home with sky, earth and plain; strong families living in societies that valued and cared for their members. Not only was most of this destroyed but what little remained was locked up on reservations in desolate territory, far from public sight.

So the novel *Dances with Wolves* was written in part because I wanted to present some of the record of history as I see it. It was my hope that in showing what was lost, something might be regained—not the least of which could be new respect for the proud descendants of the people I wrote about, who are living yet on reserves where our ancestors confined them.

Michael Blake, *Dances with Wolves*, 1988 (afterword written in 1991) – Manuel Shine Bright, LLCE  
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1. controlling, conquering 2. prejudiced 3. ancestors 4. destruction