"Those invaluable but greatly abused members of the community"

Dogs and Difference on the Great Plains in the Fur Trade Era

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Perhaps no other animal dominates the historical literature and collective memory of the Great Plains like the horse. There is no disputing the animal's importance to the region and its people. The adoption of equestrianism allowed Indigenous nations to travel, trade, and raid farther and more efficiently than ever before, and the vision of a mounted Blackfoot or Lakota warrior charging after a herd of bison is among the most iconic images associated with the region. Equestrianism, however, also stimulated increased warfare, socioeconomic stratification, and precipitated the ecological degradation that undermined the political independence of the peoples dependent on horses.

While the introduction of the horse brought seismic changes to the region, Great Plains peoples still utilized the services of the region's oldest domesticated animal: the dog. Dogs have much to teach us about how fur trade participants formed views of their neighbors and associates. People worked with dogs, ate dogs, and discussed the benefits and annoyances of the creature. Indeed, dogs provide a useful window through which to view how diverse groups on the Great Plains constructed concepts about each other's character and culture.

How a society views animals offers an important entry point for analyzing intercultural interactions. Cultural preconceptions mediate relationships with animals, and different groups take varying approaches to the treatment of animals. What is normal to one culture may be considered foreign, exotic, or even dangerous to another. As anthropologists John Sorenson and Atsuko Matsuka note, dogs play a pivotal role in "the social construction and performance of human self-definition and boundaries in terms of class, family, gender, nation, and race," as well as being used to "assert power, privilege, and status."[1]

1. John Sorenson and Atsuko Matsuka, "Introduction," in John Sorenson and Atsuko Matsuka, ed., *Dog's Best Friend? Rethinking Canid-Human Relations* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), pp. 5, 8–9.

As Euro-American influence expanded in the Great Plains in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fur trade bourgeois—the men in charge of trading post operations—along with company clerks, explorers, and government officials, used dogs and language about dogs to claim mastery and superiority over workers, Native peoples, and the natural environment, thereby establishing and reinforcing Euro-American claims to political and social dominance over the region.[2] Fur trade officials and the well-heeled middle- and upper-class bureaucrats, explorers, and scientists who traveled the Great Plains had distinct ideas about dogs that often seemed at odds with those of their employees and Native peoples. Critiquing the "wildness" and ill-behavior of American Indians' dogs reinforced ideas about Euro-Americans' ability to control the natural environment. Treating dogs well was another sign of social and racial differentiation in fur trade society. Bourgeois and clerks, especially, went to great lengths to distance themselves from their employees by emphasizing class-based ideas about proper comportment and sentimentality. Even when the management class inflicted violence on animals, critics of these practices framed the actions within a well-defined moral worldview. Finally, eating dogs in ceremonial and everyday contexts allowed Euro-Americans to claim knowledge over a "wild" landscape and "savage" foodways, using meals to demonstrate their own masculinity and control of "exotic" gastronomic encounters.

Dogs also played an essential role in Native life and the fur trade on the Great Plains. These animals were "indispensable to the Indians to transport their baggage," wrote Prince Maximilian of Wied, a shrewd observer of regional life.[3] Travois—a type of sledge made of two poles lashed together—and sleds maximized canine power. For Hidatsa women, the dog travois was "almost in daily use" around the villages.[4] Dog

2. Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Rise and Fall of Plains Indians Horse Cultures," *Journal of American History* 90 (Dec. 2003): 834, 846; John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwest Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 3–18; Brandi Bethke, "Dogs Days to Horse Days: The Introduction of the Horse and Its Impact on Human-Dog Relationships Among the Blackfoot," in Brandi Bethke and Amanda Burtt, ed., *Dogs: Archaeology Beyond Domestication* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020), pp. 168–80.

3. Alexander Philipp Maximilian, Prince of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832–1834*, vols. 22–24 of Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1904–1907), 22:309.

4. Quote in Gilbert L. Wilson, "The Horse and the Dog in Hidatsa Culture," *Anthropolog-*

transportation was most efficient during the winter; their light weight made dogsleds superior to horses when pulling over crusted snow and frozen rivers. When a dog team got into rhythm, it made for "pleasant traveling," wrote fur trader Alexander Henry.[5] Likewise, Jesuit priest Father Pierre-Jean De Smet found his trip on a frozen Canadian river "quite a novelty" and the sled a "particularly convenient and agreeable" mode of transportation.[6] Dogs also possessed great stamina. During winter trips, they could travel farther and faster than horses and required less maintenance. There were stories of dogs traveling over a week straight with little or no food and reaching their destination no

ical Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. 15, part 2 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1924), pp. 219–20; Henry A. Boller, *Among the Indians: Eight Years in the Far West, 1858–1866, Embracing Sketches of Montana and Salt Lake* (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Zell, 1868), pp. 30, 177.

5. Elliott Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799 to 1814*, 3 vols. (London: Suckling and Company, 1987), 1:209.

6. Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson, ed., *Life, Letters, and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J., 1801–1873*, 4 vols. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), 2:533–34.

In this Karl Bodmer painting (ca. 1840), Mandan Indians use dogs to pull a toboggan across the frozen Missouri River.

worse for wear.[7] Winter travel could still be hazardous, however. Long journeys could cut a dog's paw pads and cause great discomfort. Sudden blizzards were the greatest trail hazard. In January 1834, Fort Union bourgeois Kenneth McKenzie lamented that one of his traders had "lost his best dogs in a snow storm."[8]

Because of their utility as work animals, dogs were a highly sought-after commodity. In pre-equestrian days, families counted their wealth in canines. An elite Crow family might own more than one hundred animals. If someone approached a Mandan or Hidatsa woman about selling a dog, she consulted the family's other women and only made the transaction if everyone agreed to the sale.[9] In the farthest reaches of the northern plains, a well-trained dog might sell for $100, but they were usually less expensive along the Missouri River. Trader Robert Campbell purchased two dogs from the Assiniboines for a blanket apiece. North West Company operative François-Antoine Larocque paid for one animal with twenty rounds of ammunition, a knife, a sewing awl, thirteen glass beads, and vermillion. If Native bands were far from trading posts, the supply of dogs might dwindle and result in calls for the next trading or resupply party to bring more animals.[10] Beyond

7. Rudolph Friederich Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz: An Account of His Experiences Among Fur Traders and American Indians on the Mississippi and Upper Missouri Rivers During the Years 1846 to 1852*, trans. Myrtis Jarrell and ed., J. N. B. Hewitt (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), p. 239; William Laidlaw to P. D. Papin, 28 Dec. 1833, in *Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Chouteau: Journal and Letter Books*, transcribed and annotated by Michael M. Casler and W. Raymond Wood (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2017), p. 124; Maximilian of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 24:51.

8. Maximilian of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 24:51; J. B. Tyrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784–1812* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), pp. 247, 466; Quote in Kenneth McKenzie to Henry Picotte, 18 Jan. 1834, in *Fort Union and Fort William Letter Book and Journal, 1833–1835*, transcribed and annotated by W. Raymond Wood and Michael M. Casler (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2020), p. 17 ("lost").

9. John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1955), p. 312; Robert H. Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (1935; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 91; Alfred W. Bowers, *Mandan Social and Ceremonial Organization* (1950; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 27; Wilson, "The Horse and the Dog in Hidatsa Culture," p. 206.

10. Maximilian of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 24: p. 53; "The Private Journal of Robert Campbell," 17 Nov. 1833, *Fort Union and Fort William Letter Book and Journal*, p. 93; François-Antoine Larocque, "Missouri River Journal, Winter, 1804–1805,

The Crows and Blackfeet of the Yellowstone River region transported their possessions on travois pulled by dogs and horses, as seen in this illustration by George Catlin.

their practical economic significance, however, dogs were central to how Great Plains peoples interpreted and judged one another.

Euro-American colonists and conquerors brought their preconceptions about dogs to the Americas.[11] Upper- and middle-class Euro-Americans used the language of breeding to create delineations between themselves and their poorer neighbors. Owning the right kind of dog became a status symbol in the eighteenth and nineteenth cen-

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February, 7, 1805," in *Early Fur Traders on the Northern Plains: Canadian Travelers Among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians: The Narratives of John Macdonnell, David Thompson, François-Antoine Larocque, and Charles McKenzie*, ed. W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), pp. 152–53; Kenneth McKenzie to James Kipp, 17 Dec. 1833, in *Fort Union and Fort William Letter Book and Journal*, p. 9.

11. Marion Schwartz, *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 3. The scholarship on dogs in the Americas is thin compared to that of horses. The standard work describing dogs in Native North America is Glover M. Allen, "Dogs of the American Aborigines," *Bulletin, Museum of Comparative Zoology* 63 (1920): 431–517. Allen's work consists largely of commentary on canine appearance, physiological measurements, and extensive quotations from explorers and scientists. By far the best work on the Great Plains is Wilson, "The Horse and the Dog in Hidatsa Culture."

turies, and observers drew inferences about social groups based on the characteristics of their animals. Scientific animal breeding was an eighteenth-century response to the idea that nature was imperfect and needed improvement. Euro-Americans increasingly fixated on purity, an idea that manifested itself in the creation of the English Foxhound, Europe's first purebred, pedigreed dog. Mixed-breed animals became associated with wildness, and their owners as ill-bred and potentially disruptive to the proper social order. To regulate such dogs and their owners, the British Parliament passed a series of taxes designed to limit the population of "curs," "mutts," and "mongrels." These animals, characterized as loafers, thieves, and nuisances, reflected the potentially bestial nature of the English lower classes. Similar debates took place in the United States, resulting in conflicts over dog ownership that became proxies for racial, class, ethnic tensions in the antebellum years.[12]

In part, Euro-Americans judged Native peoples' cultural development through a canine lens. For settler colonists, domestication and scientific animal breeding reflected mankind's ability to rationally organize the world and conquer "wild" spaces. Farms, Christian missions, and European menageries all testified to their superiority. Native peoples, settlers claimed, did not properly breed dogs, and therefore could not be considered "civilized."[13]

The connection between wolves, wildness, and Native dogs was especially prevalent in the minds of Euro-Americans, who brought a long history of hating and killing wolves to North America. Wolves could destroy settlers' livestock, threatening private property and settlers' self-identity as tamers of the wilderness. Across the continent, newcomers marked them for destruction.[14] Fur traders and travelers, who considered Native dogs both annoying and dangerous, associated these

12. Martin Wallen, "Well-Bred is Well-Behaved: The Creation and Meaning of Dog Breeds," in Sorenson and Matsuka, ed., *Dog's Best Friend?* pp. 59–66, 74–77; Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 8, 10, 14, 20–21.

13. Joshua Abram Kercsmar, "Wolves at Heart: How Dog Evolution Shaped Whites' Perceptions of Indians in North America," *Environmental History* 21 no. 4 (2016): 517, 521, 523, 527; Benjamin Breen, "'The Elks Are Our Horses': Animals and Domestication in the New France Borderlands," *Journal of Early American History* 3, no. 2–3 (2013): 186–192.

14. Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 2, 5, 10–11.

animals with wolves and wildness. These noisy animals produced a "mournful howl" and made a "prodigious uproar" whenever the mood struck. Several writers attributed this to "wolfish ancestry." The creatures did not even have "a decent bark like our well-bred American dogs," observed Thaddeus Culbertson.[15] Others complained about the animals' thievishness. They often prowled for meat in the camps and went after personal items to satisfy their hunger or curiosity. Once, a pack of dogs got into the lodge where Pierre-Jean De Smet slept. When the Jesuit missionary awoke, he found his food gone, along with his shoes, cassock, and one pantleg.[16] Dogs made life dangerous for domestic livestock at fur trade posts, such as when they chased Francis Chardon's chickens at Fort Clark (the trader fired his rifle at the miscreants and missed, attributing the poor shot to a "hard" trigger), or when marauding dogs killed a goat and a buffalo calf at Fort Tecumseh on the Missouri River. Worse, dogs brought fleas into the men's quarters and made sleep difficult.[17]

Maximilian of Wied, a German prince and naturalist, commented on wildness, wolves, and Native dogs during his travels on the Missouri River in the early 1830s. Everywhere he went he found the boundaries between domestic and wild blurred. The Crows had ferocious "packs of large wolflike dogs." They howled constantly and attacked the expedition members. Blackfeet dogs were somewhat better behaved than Crow canines, but the prince wrote that they "looked just like wolves" and "bared their wolves' teeth" before tearing into each other. Around Fort Union, Maximilian noted that the dogs of the Native camps be-

15. Quotes in Boller, *Among the Indians*, pp. 51 ("mournful"), 69 ("prodigious"), 177 ("wolfish"); Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, pp. 81, 239; Prince Alexander Philipp Maximilian of Wied, *The North American Journals of Prince Maximilian of Wied*, ed., Stephen S. Witte and Marsha V. Gallagher, trans. Dieter Karch, 3 vols. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008–2012), 3:7.

16. Boller, *Among the Indians*, pp. 69, 230; Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, p. 233; Alexander Philipp Maximilian of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 24: p. 107; Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters, and Travels*, 2:510.

17. Quote in Francis A. Chardon, *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834–1839*, ed., Annie Heloise Abel (1932; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 49–50. See also Maximilian, *North American Journals*, 3:7; Fort Tecumseh Journal, 21 and 23 March 1831, in *Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Chouteau*, p. 34; Boller, *Among the Indians*, p. 77; Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, pp. 209–10, 312–13; Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest*, 1:225.

haved like wild animals, attacking the post's chickens with reckless abandon. In his most telling comparison, he wrote that while Indian dogs howled like wolves, the fort's dogs barked, a characteristic he attributed to their "European" origin.[18]

Though Euro-American observers attributed the wildness of Indigenous dogs to intimate contact with wolves, fur traders were often unable to successfully police the boundaries between their own animals and the region's lupine population. Artist Rudolph Friederich Kurz, who worked for the American Fur Company at Fort Union, reported that the post's dogs "not infrequently" mated with wolves. On the Pembina River, Alexander Henry complained that female dogs in heat were a nuisance. The male dogs became so uncontrollable that his men drove the animals out of the stockade. Out on the prairie, wolves once tore a dog "to pieces" in a clash over mating rights. Henry claimed that female wolves preferred his canines and "daily came near the fort to entice" the dogs.[19] The inability to keep the animals separate called into question the ability to maintain a clear delineation between the "wild" and the "tame" at the posts dotting the Great Plains.

Among American Indians, meanwhile, dogs occupied an ambiguous position. At their best, canines embodied the noble characteristics of courage, resourcefulness, and loyalty. At their worst, they were symbols of degradation, wildness, filthiness, and promiscuity. Despite these contradictions—or perhaps because of them—dogs figured prominently in the artistic, economic, social, and spiritual lives of Native peoples from the Arctic Circle to Tierra del Fuego.

Systematic dog breeding took place in Native North America, despite Euro-American claims to the contrary. In pre-equestrian days the Pawnees culled runts to ensure that the largest and strongest animals survived.[20] Among the Hidatsas, women took great care of mothers and

18. Maximilian of Wied, *North American Journals*, 2:199 ("packs"), 2:245 ("looked" and "bared"), 2:388, 3:7 ("European").

19. Theodore Culbertson, *Journal of an Expedition to the Mauvaises Terres and the Upper Missouri in 1850*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 83; Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, p. 239; Maximilian of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 22:310, 318; Coues, *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest*, 1:166.

20. John R. Bozell, "Changes in the Role of the Dog in Protohistoric-Historic Pawnee Culture," *Plains Anthropologist* 33 (February 1988), pp. 97, 106.

Prince Alexander Philipp Maximilian zu Wied-Nuweid, a German explorer, naturalist, and ethnologist, faithfully detailed his encounters with various plains peoples including the Mandans, Hidatsas, Lakotas, and Blackfeet between 1832 and 1834.

their litters, keeping them indoors until the young ones could fend for themselves. They fed puppies bits of cooked meat, avoiding raw flesh because of the danger of worms. Villagers exempted pregnant females from hard physical labor, and no one was ever to kick them in the belly. Seven to ten pups made up an average litter; owners usually kept three or four and killed or gave away the rest. Holy men ritually smoked puppies in a ceremony to ensure good health. Then the owner dropped the animals from a short height; Hidatsas viewed it as a good sign if the puppy kept its footing when it hit the ground, because this meant it would be a good worker. The tribe castrated dogs at one year of age to

make them more manageable and give them a better temperament. If the dogs survived puppyhood, they became productive working members of Hidatsa society.[21]

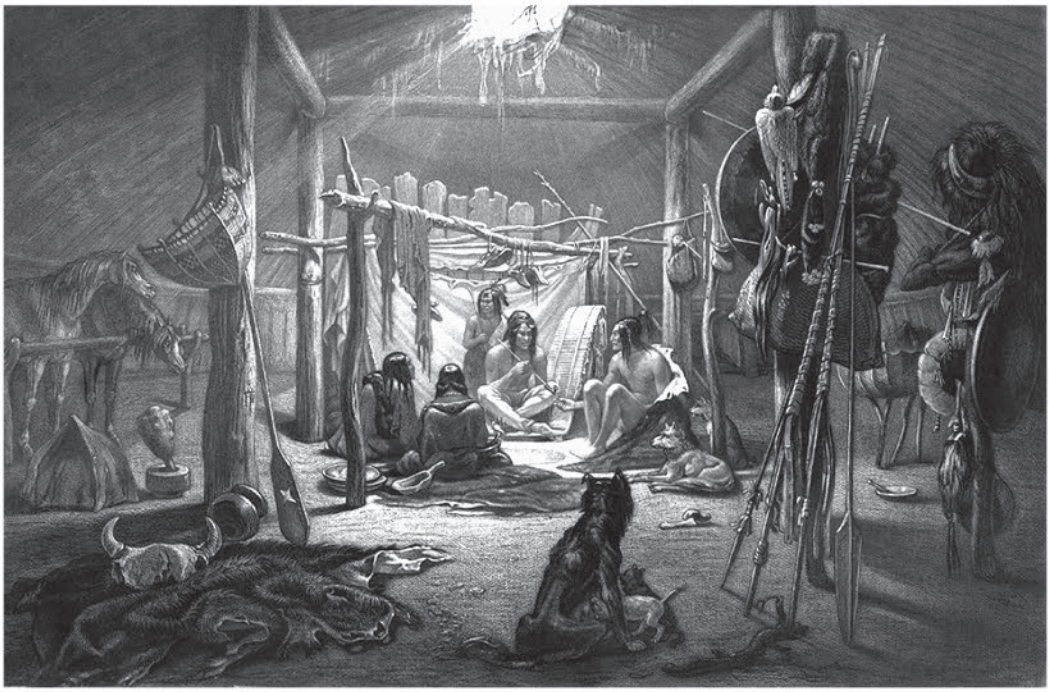
Both traders and American Indians deployed canine language as an insult. In mid-nineteenth century American working-class culture, men were especially touchy about being associated with dogs. Calling someone a "bitch" or a "son of a bitch" were fighting words. The use of the former referred to a female dog in heat and implied that the woman targeted with the insult was unable or unwilling to control her sexual impulses; "son of a bitch" not only insulted a man's mother but called his familial legitimacy into question.[22] In the fur trade world, men might use "dog" to insult American Indians, such as when Francis Chardon called the Mandans the "meanest, dirtiest, worthless, cowardly set of Dogs" on the Missouri River. Workers at the trading posts also turned the insult on any dictatorial bourgeois, protesting those who worked their men like "dogs." Groups across the Great Plains used the language of canine insult to claim mastery over people, degrade them, and protest their own poor treatment. Lakotas threatened to kill or whip their enemies like dogs. Hidatsas felt the Lakotas were "wild and surly," just like their canines. Anyone taken captive in battle might receive the appellation, which implied subservience to and identity as the property of their captor.[23]

Euro-Americans judged Native nations who relied primarily on dogs as "poor" and "pitiable." For instance, the Assiniboines owned few horses but relied heavily upon their dogs as laborers and companions. The typical family owned between six and twelve, and their value was such

21. Wilson, "The Horse and the Dog in Hidatsa Culture," pp. 199–202. Crow dog owners also believed that castrated dogs made better travois pullers. *See* Lowie, *The Crow Indians*, p. 91.

22. Paul A. Gilje, *To Swear Like a Sailor: Maritime Culture in America, 1750–1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 21–28.

23. Quote in Wilson, "The Horse and the Dog in Hidatsa Culture," p. 229-230. See also Chardon, *Chardon's Journal*, p. 28; Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurtz*, p. 200; Boller, *Among the Indians*, p. 365; Raymond J. DeMallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 132, 390–91; R. Eli Paul, ed., *Autobiography of Red Cloud: War Leader of the Oglalas* (Missoula: Montana Historical Society Press, 1997), p. 117; Breen, "'The Elks Are Our Horses,'" pp. 184–86; Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 19, 35, 38, 49, 51, 55.



Swiss-born artist Karl Bodmer accompanied Prince Maximilian of Wied on his travels in North America. They spent the winter of 1833–1834 at Fort Clark in present-day North Dakota and as guests of the Mandan tribe, where Bodmer depicted the interior of a Mandan hut.

that the animals were sometimes killed upon their owner's death to accompany the person into the afterlife. Without horses, Assiniboines often could not hunt bison as effectively as their more equestrian neighbors, and they lived under the constant shadow of starvation, wrote outside observers. Even their dogs seemed second-rate. They were the "most wretched animals in existence," wrote the Jesuit missionary Pierre-Jean De Smet. Similar negative judgments were levied on the Cree and Stoney peoples.[24]

24. Boller, *Among the Indians*, pp. 39, 135; Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arikaras, Assiniboines, Crees, Crows*, ed. John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), p. 96; Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters, and Travels*, 2:510; Robert H. Lowie, "The Assiniboine," in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 4, part 1 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1910), pp. 15, 42; Maximilian of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 23:14, 202.

Dogs were also sometimes targets of gratuitous violence and physical abuse. Accounts of killing and abusing dogs are common in fur trade literature. These outbursts reinforced the ambiguity of canine status on the Great Plains. Examining the context of violence illuminates the extent to which ideas about blood sport and rough masculinity pervaded Euro-American culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Animal abuse was intricately connected to the sporting life. Bullfighting, dogbaiting, and bearbaiting took place alongside cockfighting and bareknuckle boxing in American cities. According to historian Richard Stott, conceptions of animal suffering and empathy were "beyond the frame of moral reference" for many Americans. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, a rising urban middle class began to criticize these practices and made repugnance of blood sports and the tender care of domestic animals markers of refinement, sentimentality, and moral superiority. Such claims helped middle-class Americans set themselves apart from laborers.[25]

While fur trade employees valued dogs and horses as private property and reflections of their own status as skilled workers, they frequently subjected these animals to violence. Despite occasional demonstrations of affection, this masculine work culture included "a strain of humor that voyageurs shared with other early modern peoples" that involved the abuse and killing of animals. Tense class interactions precipitated some of the violence in this wider trans-Atlantic cultural milieu. French apprentices, for example, rounded up cats belonging to their masters and mistresses, put the animals on trial for crimes against the workers, and hanged them in a public display of animosity over deteriorating workplace conditions. Dogs were also targets of carnivalesque violence.[26] Alexander Henry reported an incident in which voyageurs "amused themselves" by watching one of their dogs "copulating" with

25. Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 2–3, 5, 17–19, 22, 52, 62 (quote on p. 52); Hans C. Rasmussen, "The Culture of Bullfighting in Antebellum New Orleans," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 55 (2014): 133–76; Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2006), pp. 18, 164–65, 184, 194–96.

26. Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), pp. 11–12, 187–90 (quote on p. 187); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Events in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), pp. 75–106.

a wolf. With the dog expecting no danger and the wolf "stuck," the men rushed forward with axes and clubs and beat the two animals to death.[27] Explorer and cartographer David Thompson criticized his men for their behavior, claiming that "a Canadian never seems to be better pleased than, when swearing at, and flogging his dogs."[28] He also witnessed one of his men beat a dog to death in a fit of rage. The underlying implication was clear to high-ranking officials in the fur trading companies: the common laborers who formed the backbone of the fur trade workforce were cruel, violent, and unable to master their emotions.

27. Coues, *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest*, 1:166.
28. Tyrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 444 (see also p. 446).

In this depiction of Comanches breaking camp, Catlin captured the pandemonium that often resulted from using dogs as beasts of burden. Fights that broke out among the dogs often led to fights among the women—to the amusement of the tribe's men.

Despite their criticism of the fur trade's underclass, fort administrators and clerks sometimes reveled in animal abuse too. At Fort Union, wrote Friederich Kurz, bourgeois and clerks pitted their animals against one another "so that they might determine which master had the most powerful dog in the land."[29] Linking animal blood sport to social status and community leadership had a long history in North America, but Prince Maximilian of Wied viewed domestic animal abuse as a problem that transcended race, class, and ethnicity. His criticism of Indians starving and beating dogs was intense, but he reserved harsher rebuke for his fur trade hosts. "In America, people are very harsh toward all animals," he wrote. The prince often observed underfed dogs. At Fort Clark, they looked "like skeletons." Even dogs with torn and bloodied paws were not immune from abuse. When the prince witnessed James Kipp manhandling his dogs in preparation for a downriver trip, the creatures howled "pitifully" in pain. "Animals," Maximilian raged, "dogs as well as horses, are terribly maltreated in this country." The fur traders "do not have any pity on them," he claimed, and cared nothing for their suffering.[30]

Violence, however, was only one part of the story of human-canine relationships on the Great Plains. People also valued them as pets and companions. Archaeological evidence of this connection dates back almost two thousand years in North America. At the Dinwoody Site in Wyoming, rock art from around 400 CE shows a human figure leading a leashed dog. For many American Indians, the bond between the youngest and oldest members of society and their dogs was especially strong. Lakota children nursed puppies with meat juices from a deerskin bag affixed with a nipple. Kurz related the story of an elderly Assiniboine woman's love for her dog. When their camp crossed an ice-choked river, the animal hesitated. Stranded on the opposite bank from the people, the dog ran back and forth, dragging its tail on the ground and crying "distressingly." The woman called out to it repeatedly. Finally, the animal plunged into the stream and, dodging ice flows, made it across and collapsed into its mistress's arms. If the dog had drowned, Kurz was certain that the old woman would have been devastated.[31]

29. Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, p. 227.

30. Maximilian of Wied, *North American Journals*, 3:24, 113, 248, 250.

31. Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, p. 87; Schwartz, *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas*, pp. 46–47;

Fur traders also kept dogs as pets, valuing them in ways that paralleled larger cultural values of sentimentality and caregiving that shaped middle-class culture in eastern urban enclaves. Naming animals and having their portraits painted increasingly became components of antebellum American animal ownership. Giving a dog a name implied a close animal-human bond and at least a measure of affection. Having a dog painted or photographed in playful poses was also popular and represented a significant investment of the owner's time and money.[32] So deep was Edwin Denig's affection for his dog, Natoh, that he commissioned Kurz to paint the animal's portrait. The Fort Union bourgeois hung the finished image in his office. The artist was gratified to see that visiting Indians recognized the dog at once, but he noted that they were confused about why Denig had asked for the image in the first place. Sadly, Natoh died of injuries sustained fighting with other dogs at the post.[33]

Some of the same men who beat dogs and pitted them against each other were also capable of great displays of sentimentality and expressed feelings of loss when their dogs died or disappeared. Although they rarely tied these emotions to the high moral purposes middle-class reformers attributed to caring for animals, there are many examples of concern for canine welfare. Thaddeus Culbertson lost his dog, Tip, after a brutal summer day's travel. Suffering dreadfully from thirst, Tip saw water, was "seized with a fit of madness," and ran off, to "the great regret of the company." Alexander Henry's dog, Castor, passed away from an infected neck boil. Although Henry lanced it multiple times and "let out much foul matter," Castor refused to eat for over a week and finally died. The trader noted that "many" of the post's dogs died from such infections.[34]

Government explorers and soldiers on the southern plains also lamented the loss of valuable dogs in highly sentimental language. During the return trip to the United States from the Rocky Mountains, one of

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Royal Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 178; Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, p. 233.

32. Grier, *Pets in America*, pp. 86, 127, 129.

33. Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, pp. 144, 199, 227.

34. Culbertson, *Journal of an Expedition*, p. 32; Coues, *New Light on Early History of the Greater Northwest*, 1:173.

An unidentified American Indian woman stands with a dog harnessed to a travois in this undated image (ca.1880s).

the dogs accompanying Stephen H. Long's expedition died of thirst and heatstroke. Caesar, the much-loved canine, died "in the arms of one of the men," even though the soldiers had already shared water from their canteens to relieve the animal's suffering. Another dog survived only because a trooper carried the animal across his saddle to the Arkansas River. "To travelers in such a country," wrote Edwin James, "any domesticated animal, however abject, becomes an acceptable companion."[35]

On one occasion, a dispute over a missing dog escalated into violence and temporary hard feelings. Robert Campbell, the chief trader at Fort William on the upper Missouri, lost his dog in November 1833. Suspecting foul play, he sent one of his men to confront Kenneth McKenzie at Fort Union. Campbell's employee saw the dog and demanded its return. When the American Fur Company men refused, a fight broke out. Campbell admitted to his journal that his man "was a little intoxicated." McKenzie promised to return the animal to Fort William. The next day, Campbell noted succinctly in his journal, "McKenzie did not send the dog." This refusal incensed Campbell; the aggrieved trader "valued him more from my attachment to him than for his services." The dispute appears to have gone unresolved because of more pressing matters and the desire for more amenable human interaction. That same day, one of Campbell's chickens died from "internal injuries." Craving sociability, he dined with McKenzie three days later, choosing to forgive and forget the dog theft.[36]

The conditions under which people ate dogs also played a significant role in the ways Great Plains peoples evaluated one another. Sometimes necessity dictated that Native peoples and fur traders eat their dogs. Pawnee and Cheyenne warriors occasionally ate dogs on long hunts or war expeditions if other rations ran low. Similarly, fur traders most often consumed dogs during the winter months after they exhausted their food supplies. Archaeologists found the first definitive evidence

35. Quote in John R. Bell, *The Journal of Captain John R. Bell: Official Journalist for the Stephen H. Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, 1820*, ed. Harlin M. Fuller and LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1957), p. 228; Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains Performed in the Years 1819, 1820*, vols. 14–17 of Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels*, 16:238.

36. "The Private Journal of Robert Campbell," 18, 19, 21, 24 November 1833, in *Fort Union and Fort William Letter Book and Journal*, p. 93.

of the practice dating to over nine thousand years ago in a Texas cave. It is difficult to draw continental generalizations about American Indians' views on eating dogs, but anthropologist Marion Schwartz identifies three broad categories: those always averse to eating dogs, those who did it for ceremonial or occasional subsistence purposes, and groups having so few dogs the issue never arose.[37]

37. Schwartz, *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas*, pp. 63, 86; John Sorenson, "Eating Dogs," in *Dog's Best Friend?*, p. 251. Native nations averse to eating dogs included the Nez Perce, Comanche, Apache, and Navajo. See Allen V. Pinkham and Steven R. Evans, *Lewis and Clark Among the Nez Perce: Strangers in the Land of the Nimiipuu* (Washburn, N.Dak.: The Dakota Institute Press of the Lewis and Clark Fort Mandan Foundation, 2013), pp. ii–iii, xiv, 15, 63; Ernest Wallace and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), p. 69; Bozzell, "Changes in the Role of the Dog," p. 107; George Bird Grinnell, *By Cheyenne Campfires* (1926; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 40; William Laidlaw to Henry Picotte, 6 Feb. 1833 and Laidlaw to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., 28 April 1834, in *Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Chouteau Journal and Letter Books*, pp. 109, 135; Maximilian of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 24: p. 89; Tyrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 395; Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri: The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833–1872* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 177.

In February 1834, Bodmer painted this scene of the Mandans crossing the frozen Missouri River to Fort Clark.

Colonial encounters involving food and eating offer intriguing insights at how groups viewed and evaluated each other's cultures. Shared meals, writes historian Coll Thrush, sort groups by differentiating people along the lines of "self/other, indigenous/foreign, cultivated/wild, savage/civilized, traditional/modern, and reason/superstition."[38] For colonizers and frontiersmen especially, unfamiliar environments and foodways challenged their identity as civilizers. In their initial culinary encounters, settlers, explorers, traders, soldiers, and scientists often created hierarchies with their own foods at the top of the gastronomic pyramid. If possible, they recreated foodways that utilized familiar ingredients. But colonizers often had to reshape their diet based on availability, resulting in cuisine that blended elements of Euro-American and American Indian traditions.[39]

For Euro-Americans writing about their western travels for audiences back home, comparing the taste of dog to more familiar foods was one way to tame and domesticate an exotic (and to sensitive readers, potentially disgusting and morally objectionable) meal. Some indicated that dog dishes tasted better than they expected. Pierre-Jean De Smet rhapsodized about a meal he once consumed, finding the meat "very delicate and extremely good." Another time he wrote that it tasted like "suckling pig." Prairie and mountain traveler Rufus Sage also favorably compared the taste of dog to pork. John C. Frémont and Prince Maximilian turned to the example of mutton as their closest domestic approximation. Other westerners lauded the meat's nutritional values. For Thaddeus Culbertson, however, it simply "tasted strongly of dog."[40]

38. Coll Thrush, "Vancouver the Cannibal: Cuisine, Encounter, and the Dilemma of Difference on the Northwest Coast, 1774–1808," *Ethnohistory* 58 (Winter 2011): 3; Michael D. Wise, "Seeing Like a Stomach: Food, the Body, and Jeffersonian Exploration in the Near Southwest, 1804–1808," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 120 (April 2017): 462–91.

39. Shannon Lee Dawdy, "'A Wild Taste': Food and Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Louisiana," *Ethnohistory* 57 (Summer 2010): 389–90, 396, 401, 409–10; Jun U. Sunseri, "Grazing to Gravy: Faunal Remains and Indications of Genízaro Foodways on the Spanish Colonial Frontier of New Mexico," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 21 (Sept. 2017), pp. 577–78, 582, 590; Heather Trigg, "Food Choice and Social Identity in Early Colonial New Mexico," *Journal of the Southwest* 46 (Summer 2004): 224–25, 228–29, 238, 245–46.

40. Chittenden and Richardson, ed., *Life, Letters, and Travels*, 1:212, 2:682; Rufus Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains and in Oregon, California, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies; or Notes by the Way, During an Excursion of Three Years, with a Description of the Countries Passed Through, Including Their Geography, Geology, Resources, Present Condition,*

For some Euro-Americans, eating dog meat was a test of their nerve, manhood, and ability to master the cuisine of a "wild" environment. Prince Maximilian approached his first encounter skeptically but noted that his "prejudice against eating dog was quickly overcome." John C. Frémont attended a feast that tested his adaptability and sensibilities. Eager not to offend his hosts, Frémont tucked into his dish even after seeing a litter of puppies romping in another corner of the lodge. Being an honored guest, he noted that he could not let "the prejudices of

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and the Different Nations Inhabiting Them (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846), p. 98; John C. Frémont, *Frémont's First Impressions: The Original Report of His Exploring Expeditions of 1842–1884* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. 47; Maximilian of Wied, *North American Journals*, 3:288; William Philo Clark, *The Indian Sign Language, with Brief Explanatory Notes of the Gestures Taught Deaf-Mutes in Our Institutions for their Instruction, and a Description of Some of the Peculiar Laws, Customs, Myths, Superstitions, Ways of Living, Codes of Peace and War Signals of Our Aborigines* (Philadelphia: L. R. Hammersley & Co., 1995), p. 154; Culbertson, *Journal of an Expedition*, p. 55. There is some evidence that dog meat had a higher nutritional value than bison. In the Pawnee case, dogs were omnivorous and consumed maize, grass, and meat scraps—a diet that was "markedly higher in calcium, potassium, and other minerals" than bison. French-Canadian voyageurs were known to castrate their dogs before eating them "to prevent rank taste." See Bozell, "Changes in the Role of the Dog," p. 105; "The Diary of John Macdonnell," in *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Being the Narrative of Peter Pond and the Diaries of John Macdonnell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Fairies, and Thomas Connor*, ed. Charles M. Gates (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1933), p. 102.

Four Sioux women prepare dog meat for food, ca. 1910–1920.

civilization" prohibit him from accepting Lakota hospitality. "I am not of delicate nerves," he boasted to his journal after finishing the meal.[41] Lewis Garrard, a tourist who observed the Bent, St. Vrain and Company's bison robe trade on the southern plains, used his first meal of dog meat to prove his mettle to the grizzled frontiersmen with whom he traveled. John Simpson Smith, one of Garrard's guides, praised dog meat "to the very skies" in conversations with the young greenhorn. Garrard was adamant that he would never touch such a disgusting meal. When visiting a Southern Cheyenne village, Smith passed the traveler a bowl of soup. Told that it was terrapin, Garrard ate the dish "with much gusto" and called for seconds. Then Smith sprung his trap. "Well hos! How do you like dog meat?" he guffawed. Garrard turned pale; he could feel food crawling up his throat. But in the face of such mocking, he steeled himself, laughed off the joke, and declared the meal delightful. "I broke the shackles of deep-rooted antipathy to the canine breed," and "ever after remained a staunch defender of dog meat." Garrard used his experience to declare his masculinity and take a rightful place among the hard-bitten plainsmen he traveled with.[42]

For many Native peoples of the Great Plains, this food was most important when consumed in a ceremonial context. Anthropologist Raymond J. DeMallie writes that dogs were the conventional sacrificial animal for the Lakota. Although dogs sometimes embodied the negative characteristics of cowardice, licentiousness, and ill temper, they were considered more worthy of emulation than revulsion as brave, cunning, and resourceful survivors. Thus, their meat was one of the best gifts the people could offer to the spiritual powers who made life possible. When eaten in a sacred manner, dog flesh strengthened the spiritual and social solidarity of those participating in the feast.[43]

41. Maximilian of Wied, *North American Journals*, 3:288; Frémont, *Frémont's First Impressions*, pp. 47–48.

42. Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail; or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), pp. 47, 78–79.

43. DeMallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather*, p. 86, 132n23; William K. Powers and Marla M. N. Powers, "Metaphysical Aspects of an Oglala Food System," in *Food and the Social Order*, ed. Mary Douglas (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2002), pp. 51–52, 54; James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p. 121.

The heyókȟa feast offers insights into the connection between dogs and ceremonial power in Lakota culture. Heyókȟas were men who dreamed of Thunder, the most powerful and unpredictable force in their world. These Thunder Dreamers, it was thought, acquired quickness, maneuverability, and unpredictability, all of which gave them an edge over their enemies. In addition to their great military prowess, heyókȟas also protected the people from the destructive storms that pounded the Great Plains in late spring and early summer. With such tremendous power came great responsibility, so heyókȟas behaved contrarily to accepted Lakota social norms. They made themselves foolish by wearing outlandish masks, making obscene gestures at elderly women, and fumbling their way through solemn religious rituals. These actions demonstrated their extreme humility and were a sign of respect for the entity that gifted them their abilities.[44] During the heyókȟa feast, holy men sacrificed a dog to the powers residing in the West—the origin place of Thunder. A medicine man selected a puppy and painted it with a red line running from the tip of its nose to its tail, symbolizing the path of proper conduct. He extolled the virtues of dogs as companions and faithful friends. The man in charge of the ceremony sang a sacred song while his assistants slipped a noose over the puppy's neck and pulled it tight four times. On the fourth tug, someone else struck the animal on the head. They choked the animal so it could not cry out. Dying in this manner, the creature retained its symbolic breath. The dog, therefore, was spiritually alive and could convey petitions from the people to the Western powers and transmit blessings back to the Lakotas.[45]

Euro-American traders and travelers recognized that attending a dog feast was a high privilege. It was, the artist George Catlin wrote, "the most honorable food that can be presented to a stranger." When Lakotas, Pawnees, or other groups wished to make a favorable impression,

44. Kingsley M. Bray, *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pp. 42–45, 48, 64–66. Crazy Horse was the most famous Lakota Thunder Dreamer. Part of his "contrary" behavior was an extreme reluctance to broadcast his battle honors in a society that expected relentless self-promotion by its warriors. See Joseph M. Marshall III, *The Journey of Crazy Horse: A Lakota History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. xvi, 127.

45. Powers and Powers, "Metaphysical Aspects of an Oglala Food System," pp. 52–54; DeMallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather*, pp. 232–34.

In this undated plate, a small dog relaxes by a tipi.

establish new political and economic ties, or reinforce preexisting alliances, they used the dog feast as the mechanism to sacralize the event. "Feasts," explain anthropologists William and Marla Powers, "have social goals achieved by cultural means."[46] William Clark and other members of the Corps of Discovery recognized the connections between feasting, hospitality, and the power of Lakota bands hosting them. On 29 August 1804, Clark sent Nathaniel Pryor and Pierre Dorion to a Lakota camp with tobacco and a kettle of corn as a gift. The Lakotas reciprocated by carrying Pryor into their camp on a bison robe and feting the guests with "a Fat Dog," the "mark of their great respect for the party."

46. George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*, 2 vols. (1944; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 1:14; Boller,

The men found it "good & well flavored." Patrick Gass noted that the dog feast was a political tool, "a token of friendship" meant to bind the groups together. A month later, the explorers attended another solemn ceremony with smoking, speeches, and a dog feast. Following the meal, the village's women came out and danced over "the Scalps and Trofies of war" taken in battle by their men. The dancing, which featured a demonstration of Lakota military prowess, complemented the feast, which reinforced the hospitality and wealth of the host group.[47]

For Pawnee hosts, dog was a prestige food that elites and important visitors consumed in tiny amounts "as we do cake" at a wedding, noted one American dragoon officer. Observant travelers, aware of such protocols, reciprocated when possible. Francis Parkman made a good impression on Lakota headmen when he purchased a dog and other presents to host a feast in their honor. Courtesy dictated participation regardless of personal preference. Father De Smet begged out of finishing a feast but provided a gift of tobacco to compensate his host. There was a competitive element to dog feasts among the Lakotas; women took their cooking seriously and vied to see who could prepare the tastiest dishes. Men who opted out of dog feasts—such as the naturalist John Bradbury, who chose to go botanizing instead—breached the etiquette that underlay the political and socioeconomic philosophy of feasting.[48]

Dogs played a wide variety of roles in Great Plains cultures from the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth. They remained a critical cog in the transportation infrastructure and work regimes of Native villages and fur trade posts even after the adoption of the horse. At times deployed as an epithet and used as a marker of cultural degeneracy and backwardness, dogs also provided loving companionship. While their consumption saved men and women from starvation in the deep

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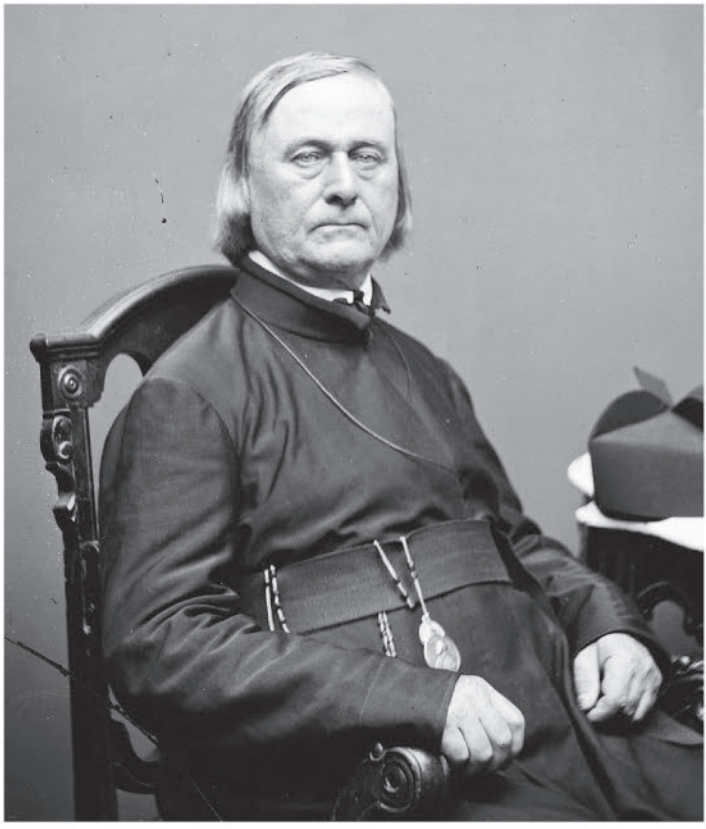
Among the Indians, p. 250; Powers and Powers, "Metaphysical Aspects of an Oglala Food System," p. 83.

47. Quote in William Clark, 26 Sept. 1804. See also Clark, 29 Aug. 1804; Patrick Gass, 29 Aug. 1804, all in lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu.

48. James Henry Carleton, *The Prairie Logbooks: Dragoon Campaigns to the Pawnee Villages in 1844, and to the Rocky Mountains in 1845*, ed. Louis Pelzer (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1943), pp. 69, 80 (quote on p. 80); Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters, and Travels*, 1: 211–12; Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (1883; repr., Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), pp. 195–97; James R. Walker, *Lakota Society*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 64; John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of North America in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811*, vol. 5 of Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels*, pp. 159–60.



Noted Jesuit missionary Pierre-Jean De Smet traveled extensively in the interior of North America between 1830 and his death in 1873—by some estimates, covering over 180,000 miles.

of winter, dog feasts also reinforced social status, demonstrated political respect, and galvanized mediation between humans and the spiritual powers that inhabited their world. Dogs had great cultural resonance for the Euro-American traders, explorers, and scientists who sought to refashion the Great Plains in their own image. How the animals behaved, how people cared for them, and even how their flesh tasted allowed these observers to evaluate employees, Native neighbors, and even themselves. Using a canine lens, these men elevated their own conceptions of civilization, refinement, and masculinity, thereby assuring their status as the arbiters of social, political, and racial hierarchies in the region.