

**D. C. Poole. *Among the Sioux of Dakota: Eighteen Months Experience as an Indian Agent, 1869-70.* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988) Intro. Raymond J. DeMallie. lvi, 241 pp., \$8.95.**

From 1869 to 1870 many Oglala and Brule Sioux lived together on their first reservation, the Whetstone Agency, on the Missouri river near Fort Randall, South Dakota. Poole was the reservation agent from 1869-70, and his memoir of that period (published in 1881) introduces the drama of cultural conflict that persists to the present day. The agent had been ordered to use persuasion of every possible kind to induce the Lakota to abandon their way of life and to turn to farming. He had been instructed to regard his wards as children, but he often expresses admiration in many of his descriptions, though rarely in overt statement. Like a novel narrated by a *persona* whose views differ from that of the author, Poole seems to be expressing conscious limitations that his narrative somehow transcends.

Of all the character portraits Poole presents, the “hero” of the story is clearly Spotted Tail, who personifies (without Poole’s knowledge) all the virtues of the Lakota warrior-leader. As if foreseeing the major problems of contemporary reservations, Spotted Tail kept his camp of four hundred lodges as far as possible from the agency to avoid whiskey and other dependencies. Poole reveals a leader of extraordinary physical courage and resourcefulness, ready to defend whites when necessary out of a consistent will to keep his own people at peace. At one point he kills a drunken troublemaker who had attempted to discharge his pistol against his chest, after which he quietly guards the agent with a cocked pistol under his blanket, while the dead man’s relatives ritually work out their anger against the white man’s whiskey rather than begin a feud against other Lakotas. Spotted Tail makes the customary gift of horses to conclude this “savage” avoidance of internecine violence. In another instance of personal courage, Spotted Tail, unable to dissuade his young men from their annual raids on the Pawnee, accompanies them to make sure they do not attack whites en route, thus preventing reprisal upon non-combatants at home.

In addition to these qualities of heart, Spotted Tail’s ironic wit emerges during the extensive description of the 1870 trip to Washington, where the Lakota leaders were brought to be awed and enticed by the wealth they might share if they agreed to become farmers. After a sumptuous feast at the Grant White House, “Spotted Tail said that the white men had many more good things to eat and drink than they ever sent out to the Indians. He was told that that was because the white man had quitted the war path and gone to farming. The chief exclaimed that he would do the same provided he could be as well treated and live in as big a house.”

For this illumination of Spotted Tail as anything but an opportunist or a sell-out, as well as for its reflection of intercultural misunderstanding

then and now, *Among the Sioux of Dakota* will be a provocative source of ongoing study.

—Julian Rice  
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**Jo Ann Robinson. *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson.* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987) xv, 190 pp., \$12.95 paper.**

Jo Ann Robinson, a major organizer of the Montgomery bus boycott, offers a new and convincing account of the origins of the protest that triggered the entire civil rights movement and launched the career of Martin Luther King, Jr. In an absorbing, first-hand narrative, the dignified and unassuming Robinson focuses on the role of the Women's Political Council (WPC) and details the WPC's plans to engineer a boycott months before the heralded arrest of Rosa Parks.

Although the Parks arrest has been universally understood as the spark that ignited the boycott, Robinson and other WPC leaders had negotiated with recalcitrant city officials over the issue of bus seating long before the boycott began. Disturbed by a series of racial incidents on city buses, the black community experienced new depths of frustration and alarm when police jailed a teenager named Claudette Colvin. Parks's arrest mattered because it constituted, in Robinson's words, "almost a repeat performance of the Claudette Colvin case." Immediately following the Parks arrest, and without consulting Parks, Robinson and the WPC mimeographed and distributed over fifty-two thousand leaflets that mentioned the name of Colvin but not Parks and urged a one-day abandonment of public transportation.

The success of this initial action led to the formation of a separate organization to supervise the boycott, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which elected King as its president. During the year-long boycott, Robinson joined other MIA representatives in negotiating with city fathers. Her copious notes of meetings allow Robinson to provide an accurate first-hand chronicle of events reported by journalists from around the globe. She describes the initial solidarity of the black community, the growing frustration during prolonged negotiations, and the hope imparted by donations sent to the MIA from Americans and foreigners alike. She also discusses the MIA's remarkable efficiency in coordinating a car pool large enough to enable fifty thousand boycotters to stay off buses indefinitely.