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High Bird: Eulogy for Joe Medicine Crow (Crow), 1914-2016

By Herman Viola, *Curator Emeritus*, Smithsonian Institution

If this were Japan, Joseph Medicine Crow would have been considered a living cultural treasure, for he was a unique individual by any standard. He excelled in two



A young Joe Medicine Crow. His grandfather was a chief of the Crow.

worlds: Native and Non-Native America. The first member of the Crow Nation to graduate from college, he was working on his doctorate in Anthropology at the University of Southern California when World War II interrupted his

studies and he enlisted the U.S. Army. Although offered a

commission because of his advanced education, Joe declined on the grounds that a warrior must first prove himself in battle before leading men into combat. As he

later confided to me, it was the worst mistake he ever made because the U.S. Army did not follow the principles of the Crow people--Joe entered and left the Army as a private.



No matter. Descended from a long and famous line of Crow war chiefs, Private Medicine Crow went on to distinguish himself on the battlefields of Europe.

To me, it was his gift as a storyteller, the carrier of his people's oral history, that made Joe so special and significant. What made his work especially unique is that Joe was a scholar as well as a storyteller. He understood the strengths and weaknesses of



Joseph Medicine Crow
— *War Chief* —
Born 1913

both oral and recorded history. Whenever possible, he verified stories by the use of archival and printed records and the memories of other participants.

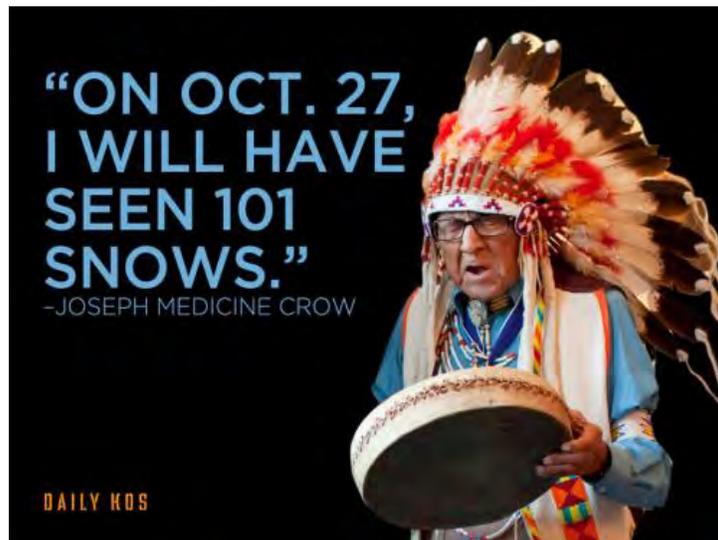
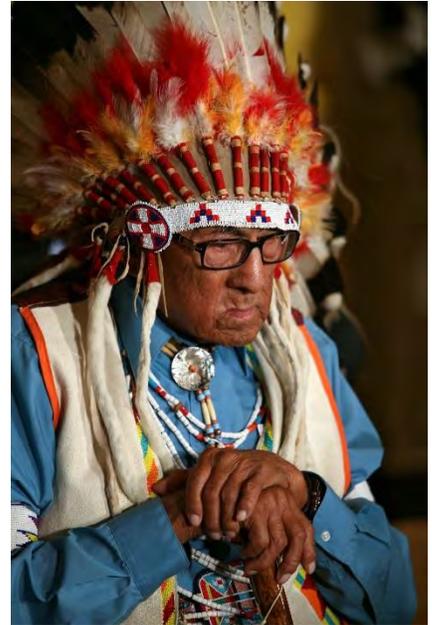
Education was a driving force in Joe's life. He firmly believed that the only way Indian people would succeed in this country was through education. He liked to quote Crow Chief Plenty Coups who said, with an education an Indian is a white

man's equal. Without it, he is the white man's victim. One way Joe carried out his strong belief in education was by helping to found the Little Big Horn College on the Crow Reservation when he was Executive Director of the Crow Central Education Commission.

I first met Joe in 1973 when he came to the Smithsonian Institution to do research on Crow history. We struck up a friendship that deepened over the years and culminated in his adoption of me as his brother. He named me One Star, after the grandfather who raised him.

I came to appreciate High Bird, the name the Crow people accorded Joe upon his return from World War II, more and more during my many visits to his beloved

Crow country. And thanks to him, after each visit I would walk away with an increased appreciation for the Crow people and their place in history.





President Obama presented Joseph Medicine Crow the Presidential Medal of Freedom on August 12, 2009.

The many accolades and tributes that have been received from across the world, including one from President Obama, are fitting tributes to this humble and honorable man, my brother High Bird, Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow.





The Presidential Medal of Freedom

Written in tribute by Herman Viola, *Curator Emeritus*,
Smithsonian Institution.



Notes:

Picture 1: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2016/04/05/joe-medicine-crow-american-indian---obituary/>

Picture 2: <https://www.aaanativearts.com/native-american-obituaries/joe-medicine-crow-last-war-chief-of-the-crow-tribe-is-dead-at-age-102.html>

Picture 3: <http://store44.com/2012/fine-art/portrait-illustrations-by-baldur-helgason/attachment/medicine-crow/>

Picture 4: <https://www.aaanativearts.com/native-american-obituaries/joe-medicine-crow-last-war-chief-of-the-crow-tribe-is-dead-at-age-102.html>

Picture 5: <http://dailykos.tumblr.com/post/101120784647/101-years-ago-today-the-last-crow-war-chief>

Picture 6: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/joseph-medicine-crow-last-crow-tribe-war-chief-dies-at-102/>

Picture 7: <http://www.fayobserver.com/military/crow-tribe-war-chief-wwii-veteran-joe-medicine-crow->

[is/article_b1eba662-c01b-566e-9114-68b7a32e7979.html](https://www.ancestry.com/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSK3-9114-68b7a32e7979?i=100&cat=9114)

Picture 8: <http://nativeamerican.lostsoulsgenealogy.com/biographies/josephcrow.htm>

Picture 9: http://ccac.gov/aboutUs/Bio_violaHerman.cfm