

DRAWING ON MUSLIN BY JAW (HIS FIGHT)

HUNKPAPA LAKOTA

CA. 1900

Friend, be alert

Any way I wish to roam about

Horses I will seek

So sang a renowned Lakota horse raider and healer born about 1850 known variously as Jaw (*Cehupa*) or His Fight (*Okicize Tawa*). The words to the song he composed reflect a young Plains Indian warrior's confidence in his abilities as a horse raider and foreshadow impending triumph. Renowned as someone who excelled in stripping enemy camps of prized horses, Jaw also earned a reputation as a skilled medicine man with an impressive knowledge about plants' curing powers. We know the words to Jaw's song because he sang them for pioneering ethnomusicologist and ethnographer Frances Densmore (1867-1957), who, around 1912, also collected this striking painting on muslin by him.

A large piece measuring nearly a yard wide and seven-and-a-half feet in length, this muslin represents the type of works Lakota warriors created to serve as tipi liners and, during the reservation period, hung on the interior walls of their log cabins. However decorative the painting may be, it also fulfilled a practical purpose by conveying information about the warrior-artist's exploits to those within the tribal milieu, traditionally a non-literate world in which imagery performed a utilitarian function as a means of communication. The autobiographical incidents Jaw commemorated in his painting stemmed from bravery in combat. It was Jaw's

personal bravery that permitted him to perform deeds which earned him the admiration and acclaim of the Hunkpapas in his *tiyo_paye* (band), the *Kigleska* (Tied in the Middle), as well as the larger community composing his tribe.

In 1911, about a year or so before Densmore acquired this muslin from Jaw, she set about collecting songs and accounts of the old-time buffalo culture from knowledgeable Lakotas at Standing Rock Reservation in southeastern North Dakota and northeastern South Dakota. Seven years later, the results of this work appeared as the now-classic “Teton Sioux Music,” published by the Smithsonian Institution’s Bureau of American Ethnology. “Teton Sioux Music” includes information about Jaw’s songs, facts about his life, and reproductions of some of his drawings. This particular example did not appear in the publication, probably because instead of transferring it to the Smithsonian Densmore kept it for herself. However, the piece possesses good provenance and is, above all, clearly Jaw’s work.

Jaw’s painting is perhaps best appreciated when some of the details of his life are taken into account. The son of a Sans Arc father and Hunkpapa mother, Jaw told Densmore in 1913 he reckoned he was born the “winter that Turtle Catcher died,” an event reported in a Hunkpapa pictographic winter count wherein the most important event of a year, or “winter,” was noted pictographically. That statement pegs his birth year as 1850, which, as is standard in Lakota winter counts, means at sometime between 1849 and 1851.

Jaw’s mother died when he was an infant. Thereafter, his grandmother took care of him, and Jaw never forgot that when he was seven he killed birds as the village moved from one campsite to another so she and he could eat. In his youth, Jaw was known as Loud Sounding Metal or Iron Sounding Good (*Máza Howa_te*). At the age of seventeen, around 1867, he participated in warfare against tribal enemies and earned the name His Battle, or His Fight and

this remained the name by which his contemporaries knew him. The moniker Jaw, a nickname bestowed by a white brother-in-law, was frequently used by non-Lakotas when referring to him during the reservation era.

As a buffalo culture warrior Jaw acquired fame as a horse raider, someone who displayed exceptional skill in stealthily entering an enemy encampment at night and making off with his foes' best mounts. On one particularly memorable occasion, he took no fewer than an astonishing seventy horses from the Crows.

"I did not waken or kill any of the Crows; I just took their horses," Jaw told Densmore, speaking of that episode. "No Sioux ever took more horses than that in one night."

As he and his compatriots approached their village, flush with victory and driving a large herd of fine ponies, Jaw gave a long, triumphant wolf howl. Then the horse raiders and their families rejoiced, singing

Horses I seek

So I am bringing them

When he went to war Jaw carried a leather pouch containing red paint mixed with grease which he used to cover his hands and feet and draw a crescent over his mouth that pointed halfway up to his cheekbones. He also painted a crescent on his horse's breast and another one on its left hindquarters, adding yellow paint across its nostrils and muzzle. Later, if the horse performed well, Jaw tied a feather in its mane or tail, sometimes knotting a strip of red trade cloth around its neck. If at any time Jaw believed his horse's performance was affected by a headache, he provided the animal with relief by chewing a herb and placing it in the horse's mouth.

For purposes of warfare and raiding, Jaw kept a pair of Medicine bags, one for himself

and another which he tied to his horse's bit. These held a powdered mixture of dried Purple Coneflower root, Western Wall Flower, Daisy, and Blazing Star. Over his shoulder, Jaw wore a wolf skin — for Lakotas, wolves represented courage and stealth, precisely the traits a horse raider sought to emulate — with an eagle wing bone war whistle tied to its nose.

Before conducting a horse raid, Jaw performed a ritual, beseeching the aid of *Wakan Tanka* (Great Holy or Great Mystery), primal force of the universe. In his right hand he clutched a pipe stem and in his left the pipe's stone bowl. Holding them out in front of him, Jaw prayed:

Wakan Tanka, behold this pipe, behold it

I ask you to smoke it

I do not want to kill anybody, I want only to get good horses

I ask you to help me

This is why I speak to you with this pipe

Shifting the pipe's stem to his left hand and the bowl to his right, he held both up to the level of his shoulder and continued:

Now, wolf, behold this pipe

Smoke it and bring me many horses

Placing his right hand on the stem, his left hand on the bowl, and pointing the stem upwards and outward at the level of his face, Jaw intoned:

Wakan Takna, behold this pipe

I ask you to smoke it

I am holding it for you

Look also at me

Jaw then put the stem in his mouth, still holding the bowl in his left hand, and said:

Wakan Tanka, I will now smoke this pipe in your honor

I ask that no bullet may harm me when I am in battle

I ask that I may get many horses

Elevating the pipe and its stem and placing them together, Jaw's words now recalled the sacrifice of his own flesh at the Sun Dance, the annual ritual of universal renewal Lakotas held every summer (outlawed by the government by the time he related these words to Densmore):

Wakan Tanka, behold this pipe and behold me

I have let my breast be pierced

I have shed much blood

I ask you to protect me from shedding more blood and to give me long life

Then Jaw made his way into the enemy camp, coming in with the darkness, protected by the wolf, and quietly singing:

Friend, a night is different from the day

So may my horses be many

It is likely Jaw participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 and accompanied Hunkpapa leader Sitting Bull into Canadian exile soon after. American artist De Cost Smith (1864-1939) met Jaw at Standing Rock Reservation in 1884, where he knew the famous horse raider as His Fight, the name Jaw's own people used when referring to him. Smith made a painting of Jaw and obtained some of his drawings, one depicting a rare rendering of a visionary experience in which Jaw dreamed of *Wakinyan* (The Winged One), the horned and winged personification of the spirit of Thunder.

Smith later wrote that by the time they met, Jaw "had already won the esteem of his people for virtues particularly Indian, but had never to any extent attracted the attention of the

whites, nor, to judge from his bearing toward them, had he any desire to do so.” Smith felt Jaw “was not so much unfriendly as indifferent, and it was some time before I came to know him.”

Ultimately, Smith concluded, with obvious admiration, Jaw was a “holy man” and “an interesting and agreeable companion.” As Smith noted, “His war expeditions and his horse stealing were undertaken in a spirit of patriotism, or loyalty, to his tribe, and almost as a religious duty.”

The painting Frances Densmore collected from Jaw around 1912 illustrates some of the patriotic deeds Smith alluded to, actions contributed to Jaw’s estimable reputation among his own people. In it, Jaw commemorates five notable exploits from his life as a Lakota warrior. They are discussed here by moving along clockwise from the upper right-hand side of the composition, which may well be the order in which Jaw intended them to be read.

1. Jaw rescues a brother warrior whose horse lies dead. The three figures at the far right represent Crow enemies on their own mounts. The sound of gunfire explodes from the barrels of their rifles, and additional representations of rifle shots indicate the firing was heavy. A Lakota warrior’s horse lies dead in front of the Crows, stretched out with a pair of bullet wounds bleeding along its flank. Jaw is shown on a blue-grey horse painted with a dark crescent design across its breast and another along its rump. Jaw — whose name is written above his head, almost certainly by Densmore — carries a buffalo hide war shield, its drop richly decorated with the black-and-white tail feathers of adolescent golden eagles. The man he rescued from the Crows sits directly behind him, wearing an eagle feather war bonnet and firing a pistol at the pursuing enemies. Both men wear red breechcloths which show the white selvedge edge that resulted from the dying process used to color these standard textiles of the

fur trade in the West. Jaw's horse also exhibits a fan of yellow-orange feathers attached to its tail.

2. Jaw saves another one of his comrades. Here, the warrior-artist carries what appears to be a coup stick — used for striking enemies in order to perform the deed guaranteed to earn the admiration of his fellow Lakotas — tipped at one end with a single eagle feather. He carries the same shield as in the drawing immediately above. His horse, its breast painted with the dark crescent seen in the preceding drawing, wears a bit of the type associated with *freno de argolla* bridle of the Spanish, who called the iron chains or jingles along the bit's bridge *coscojos*. As fur trader Henry A. Boller wrote of the Indians he encountered in the Upper Missouri River country in the 1850s and 1860s, "Those who are so fortunate as to possess one, use the heavy Spanish bit with its long iron fringes, jingling with the slightest movement of the horse." In this drawing Jaw rescues a comrade whose horse was killed by rifle fire from Crows. These enemies are shown in a kind of shorthand representation, with heads of men and horses serving to represent their presence. The sound of gunfire is shown exploding from the barrels of their weapons. The unhorsed Lakota's mount lies stretched out, two wounds bleeding just above a front leg. The dead horse's tail is tied up with a strip of red trade cloth, a standard "going to war" indicator. Jaw appears in front of the dead animal, riding a horse with a black crescent design painted across its chest. Jaw, who wears a wolf's pelt around his neck — De Cost Smith published one of Jaw's drawings showing the warrior wearing this Medicine — grasps what is probably a coup stick decorated with a single feather which he used for touching enemies to earn status. Sitting behind him is the man whose horse has been

- killed. This warrior wears a pair of eagle feathers, secured to his hair with a porcupine quill, deer hair, or turkey beard roach. The red trade cloth sash festooned with eagle feathers and worn over his shoulders and across his chest marks him as one of the Lakotas' brave "sash wearers," the bravest of the brave.
3. In the drawing at the bottom left-hand side of the muslin, Jaw shows himself riding a horse with the black crescents painted across its breast and along its rump. He wears a red trade cloth blanket draped over his shoulders, as does the warrior he rescues. That man's horse lies behind, wounded twice above a front leg by bullets fired from the rifles of Crow enemies, who blast repeatedly and futilely at the Lakotas.
 4. Moving up along the left-hand side of the painting we find Jaw riding to the assistance of a brother-warrior. This Lakota, who wears a stuffed bird in his hair — undoubtedly personal Medicine intended to protect him with its mantle of supernatural power — is in great danger, as indicated by the two bullet wounds bleeding profusely along his torso. Jaw, clad in a red trade cloth blanket, leans over from his galloping horse and steadies this comrade with his arm as Crow foes pursuing on horseback fire at them with rifles.
 5. A Lakota horse lies dead, shot twice above a front leg by mounted Crows armed with rifles. But they do not harm Jaw and the man unhorsed by their fire. Jaw's horse displays the by now familiar dark crescent painted across its breast and rump. In this composition, Jaw carries his coup stick with the single feather and this time his hair is tied up in front in a horn-like arrangement sometimes seen in Lakotas' exploit drawings. His fortunate comrade, who looks back at the Crows over his shoulder, carries a quirt in his hand.

In these five vignettes, Jaw depicts himself performing the same action: riding to the rescue of another Lakota warrior imperiled because of being unhorsed in battle by Crow enemies. Although the type of action depicted is the same in each vignette, these are separate occurrences and testify to his prowess as a brave combatant. His skill as a warrior is manifest, even though these illustrations represent but a fraction of the larger body of incidents that, together, formed a remarkable record of personal accomplishment. De Cost Smith was right; here, truly, we glimpse something of the life of a man who personified the spirit of Lakota patriotism. Through this remarkable painting, we are afforded some insight into Jaw's world, one in which he announced himself by singing

Friend, be alert

Any way I wish to roam about

Horses I will seek

Ron McCoy, Ph.D.

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