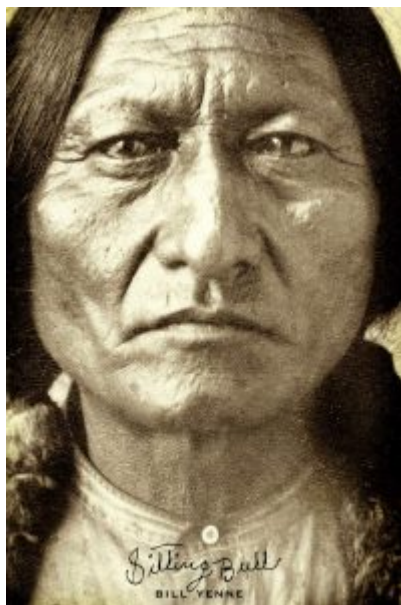


# At Standing Rock



April 1st 2016

It is 1876.  
Sitting Bull stands  
silent and alone in the dark  
on Standing Rock.

He awaits sight of Mother  
Nature's beautiful plain.

The proud Sioux Chief  
then sits  
with eagle-eyed,  
head-dressed head in hands  
crying into the mist  
on the cusp of morning.

No one else  
has yet awakened in the camp.

The day is dawning  
long before the *clever clocks* –  
the ones on silver chains  
that shun a need for sun –  
march in on the lily-white chests  
of timeless men with guns

in the inside pockets  
of brass-buttoned uniforms.

He carries  
the heavy gift of holy sight,  
looks out into the future  
of his Great People

but sees only blood  
stretch out  
in a bleeding delta  
of generations  
as far as his mind's eye  
can bear to see.

A raven flies overhead  
and casts a dark shadow  
on the red clay, on stone,  
onto a tree trunk; and  
then – after it glides low  
across the rosy-fingered  
sky – fleetingly it lands  
on the sacred back  
of a lone white buffalo  
standing conspicuous  
in the innocence  
of the sleeping, steaming herd.

It too lifts its heavy head.  
It too wants to bellow aloud.

He cries-out (silently) again;  
sweats blood, unseen.

He remembers the vast herds  
of his childhood.

They are both all eyes and ears  
and nostrils. They scent the wind.

His heart bears the searing heat  
and pain of inevitability.

It will be a short-lived victory  
at Little Bighorn.

He knows this, but will not tell  
his beautiful fresh-faced Braves.

Many will die there  
but at least they will hold some  
hope and love in their hearts;  
and feel alive before they bleed.

\*

Those mighty bellows echo  
through to this day  
and – in their wake –  
that proud and tenacious race  
with no rush for oil

(the new fools' liquid gold)  
rides in again on horseback,  
two hundred strong,  
to stand for hope here  
in this ugly face of greed.

***John D. Kelly***

The photograph is from the cover of Bill Yenne's book [\*Sitting Bull\*](#)