

Watson, was a North American best-seller in 1990, is best known for his evocative chronicles of nature and exploration, including *The Snow Leopard* (1978), an account of a trek that he made through the Himalayas in the mid-1970s that won a U.S. National Book Award. The title of *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* refers to a 19th-century Indian leader who steadfastly refused to cede Indian territory to white settlers. The book combines a clearly heartfelt lament for a broken people with an exhaustively documented account of a dark chapter in the history of the Pine Ridge Indians. And the new edition includes a bizarre epilogue: Matthiessen describes a meeting in early 1990 with a masked man who claimed to have committed the Pine Ridge murders—but who refuses to come forth publicly with his confession.

In the book's introduction, Matthiessen writes that he became familiar with the Peltier case in 1979 while interviewing the leader of a band of California Indians about the construction of a fuel terminal on their sacred grounds. Although sympathetic to many native causes, Matthiessen writes that he was initially skeptical about the American Indian Movement, which in 1973 had led a 71-day siege of Wounded Knee in an attempt to publicize Indian land claims. Before his imprisonment, Peltier had been a full-time AIM activist, and several of the group's members were convinced that he had been unfairly tried.

As Matthiessen began to examine the long history of the government's treatment of native Americans and the facts of the Peltier case, he says, he became convinced that Peltier had been framed by the FBI and that the activist's imprisonment could be understood only in the context of "underlying issues of history, racism, and economics" in America. In broad strokes, Matthiessen sets the scene for the Peltier case with an examination of a century of U.S. government dealings with American Indians.

From the notorious 1890 army massacre of 200 Indians at Wounded Knee, part of the merciless drive to settle the West, to the uranium rush of corporate America into the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming in recent years, Matthiessen's is a provocative, relentlessly cheerless tale. Borrowing from army records, congressional transcripts and the oral and written records of the Indians themselves, he argues that America has rarely swerved from the stated intentions of then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Walker, who spoke in 1872 of the need to reduce "the wild beasts to the condition of supplicants for charity."

Especially disturbing is Matthiessen's examination of the more recent activities of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. With the armed support of the FBI, Matthiessen contends, the BIA bankrolled violently anti-AIM leader Richard Wilson, chief of the Pine Ridge reserve. He points out that at the time of the shootout, Wilson's administration was receiving \$27 million a year in direct government funding, despite the fact that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights had declared Wilson's 1974 election

over AIM activist Russell Means invalid. In 1975, Matthiessen claims, the reserve had the highest crime rate anywhere in the United States, with dozens of AIM activists and their supporters being constantly harassed—and often shot. The situation was, he writes, "a feudal nightmare."

It was into that tense atmosphere that FBI



NANCY CRAMPTON

Matthiessen: hard hitting and heartfelt

agents Jack Coler and Ronald Williams drove on June 26, 1975, ostensibly seeking to charge a young Indian man with the theft of a pair of cowboy boots. Somehow—the facts remain unclear even in official BIA and FBI records of the case—shooting erupted. A heavily armed BIA SWAT team was on manoeuvres nearby, and within hours hundreds of officers had surrounded the area. Still, a small group of AIM activists and sympathizers, including Peltier, managed to make their way into the hills. Although his comrades were soon captured, Peltier fled as far as Hinton, Alta., 280 km west of Edmonton, where he was caught by the RCMP the following February.

Although rivetting, Matthiessen's account of Peltier's experiences at the hands of the Canadian and U.S. legal systems at times takes on the air of a conspiracy theory. In an angry attack on Peltier's Canadian captors, the author writes that they shackled the captive's hands and feet whenever he left his Vancouver cell—treatment that Amnesty International condemned as

"unjustifiable"—and that all observers at his trial were spread-eagled and frisked. The reason, according to Matthiessen: there was an intentionally "lurid atmosphere being whipped up to expedite [Peltier's] extradition." Matthiessen attributes that hysteria to a plan by Ottawa to quell other, unrelated native uprisings across Canada—a charge that may well be valid, but that he fails to fully substantiate.

Turning to Peltier's Fargo trial, Matthiessen draws on several thousand pages of police and court records to paint a devastating allegation of treachery and injustice. Virtually all the evidence that could have supported Peltier's case was ruled categorically inadmissible by Judge Benson, who made his disgust for Peltier and his supporters clear throughout the trial, the author says. But in his anger at Peltier's treatment in Fargo, Matthiessen sometimes makes some questionable assessments. Writing of the jury members who found Peltier guilty, Matthiessen describes them as "very conservative, rural jurors—mostly Lutherans of Scandinavian ancestry"—as if judging them by their race is any more acceptable than judging Peltier by his.

Despite those flaws, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* is a captivating account of an unusual and disturbing case. "It is," as Scarborough's Dreaver describes it, "a piece of a larger, more complex puzzle that has yet to be figured out." Like the closing arguments of a defence lawyer utterly convinced of his client's innocence, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* is argumentative and brazenly partisan—but it is also thought-provoking, spirited and compelling.