

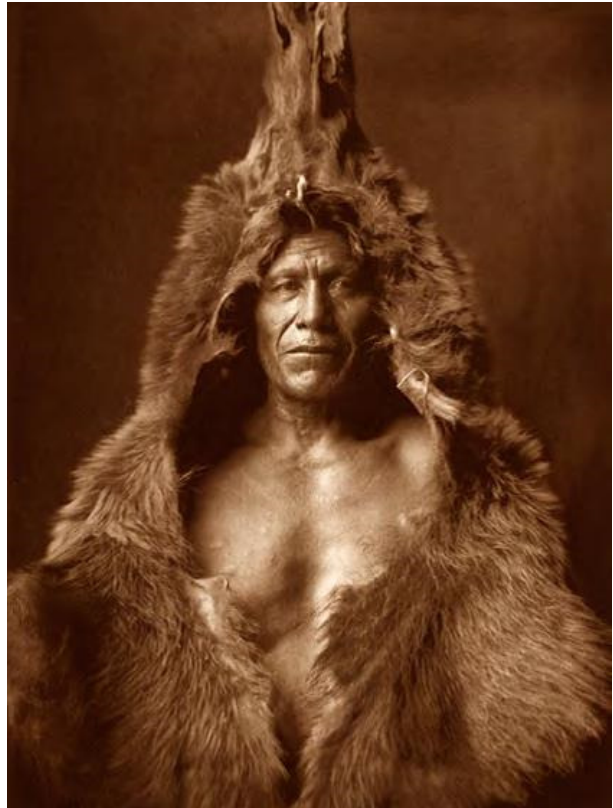
# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

## ARIKARA

### BEAR'S BELLY, *Kúníh-kanánu*

The text below accompanied the image of Bear's Belly in Volume V of Curtis' *The North American Indian*

*Born in 1847 at Fort Clark in the present North Dakota. He had no experience in war when at the age of nineteen he joined Custer's scouts at Fort Abraham Lincoln, having been told by old men of the tribe that such a course was the surest way to gain honors. Shortly after his arrival, Custer led a force into the Black Hills country; in the course of which, the young Arikara counted two first coups and one second. Bear's Belly fasted once. Going to an old man for advice, he was taken to the outskirts of the village to an old buffalo skull, commanded to strip, smear his body with white clay, and sit in front of the skull. When he had taken the assigned position, the old man held up a large knife and an awl while he addressed the buffalo skull: "this young man sits in front of you, and is going to endure great suffering. Look upon him with great favor, you and Neshanu, and give him a long, prosperous life." With that he cut pieces of skin from the faster's breast and held them out to the buffalo skull. Bear's Belly married at the age of nineteen. He became a member of the Bears in the medicine fraternity and relates the following story of an occurrence connected with that event:*



*"Needing a bearskin in my medicine-making, I went, at the season when the leaves were turning brown, into the White-Clay hills. All the thought of my heart that day was to see a bear and kill him. I passed an eagle trap, but did not stop: it was a bear I wanted, not an eagle. Coming suddenly to the brink of a cliff I saw me three bears. My heart wished to go two ways: I wanted a bear. But to fight three was hard. I decided to try it, and, descending, crept up to within forty yards of them, where I stopped to look around for a way of escape if they charged me. The only way out was by the cliff, and as I could not climb well in moccasins I removed them. One bear was standing with his side toward me, another was walking slowly toward him on the other side. I waited until the second one was close to the first and pulled the trigger. The farther one fell; the bullet had passed through the body of one and into the brain of the other. The wounded one charged, and I ran, loading my rifle, then turned and shot again, breaking his backbone. He lay there on the ground only ten paces from me and I see his face twitching. A noise caused me to remember the third bear, which I saw rushing upon me only six or seven paces away, I was yelling to keep up my courage and the bear was growling in his anger. He rose on his hind legs, and I shot, with my gun nearly touching his chest. He gave a howl and ran off. The bear with the broken back was dragging himself about with his forelegs, and I went to him and said, 'I came looking for you to be my friend, to be with me always.' Then I reloaded my gun and shot him through the head. His skin I kept, but the other two I sold."*