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"We Poor Devils": The Interactions Shared Experiences and Differing Fates of the Cheyenne Sioux Buffalo Soldiers and U.S. Army in a Post-Civil War America: 1865- 1890

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“We Poor Devils”: The Interactions, Shared Experiences, and Differing Fates of the
Cheyenne, Sioux, Buffalo Soldiers, and U.S. Army in a Post-Civil War America: 1865-
1890

By

Meghan Keegan

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Contents

Abstract.....	iii-iv
Introduction.....	1-20
Chapter One	21-43
Chapter Two.....	44-65
Chapter Three.....	66-84
Bibliography	85-92

ABSTRACT

KEEGAN, MEGHAN “We Poor Devils”: The Interactions, Shared Experiences, and Differing Fates of the Cheyenne, Sioux, Buffalo Soldiers, and the U.S. Army in a Post-Civil War America: 1865-1890

As a real yet imagined place, the “American West” has a mythical aura surrounding it that hides a deeper reality of extreme violence and chaos. It is a place where great feats have been achieved and profound defeats have been suffered. The wars fought over control of the Great Plains lasted longer than any other armed conflict in United States history. From 1865 through 1890, the chaotic nature of seemingly unorganized warfare and the ensuing violence plagued the lives of those who, either willingly or not, took part. The two most recognizable and seemingly homogenous groups in this conflict were the U.S. Army and the Plains Indian nations; however, upon further examination specific and distinct identity groups within these two generalized entities emerge.

African American soldiers, popularly known as the “Buffalo Soldiers” played an important but insufficiently recognized role on the frontier. Their experiences differ from those of white US soldiers in some important ways, including limited advancement in the ranks. Many Indian nations lived in the “West.” By looking at the experiences of the Northern Plains Indians, specifically the Sioux and Cheyenne nations, one gains insight into some of the most controversial armed conflicts. Although there is no denying that their clashes shaped their individual experiences and made them distinct from one another, the U.S. Army, Buffalo Soldiers, the Sioux and the Cheyenne all had to cope with violence, loss of life and property, and unfulfilled promises. Therefore it is important to consider these groups together. In some respects each group reacted differently to the events that brought them together, however, their shared experiences caused similar mutual feelings of suffering and endurance.

This thesis attempts to make sense of these three groups' clashing and chaotic stories by breaking down the era of the Indian resistance on the plains into three distinct phases. The Civil War threw the country into a time of disarray when the hierarchical socio-economic structure, primarily based on race, no longer seemed as immovable and now had changing implications. A pale skin-tone paired with time in the army no longer guaranteed men an honored place in society. By looking at how the end of the Civil War changed the lives of generals, officers, and soldiers in the army, as well as recently emancipated black men, their interactions with the Sioux and Cheyenne, on the Plains can be put into context and better explained.

A comprehensive look at the actual events of the wars fought, the strategies behind military engagements and battles, and the effects of resulting triumphs and defeats, is necessary to understand the establishment of a social hierarchy in the West once the frontier had been conquered and its consequences. By looking at the obligations the federal government had to each group, where they succeeded and where they failed to fulfill their duties, a better understanding of the relationships and the groups' differing and shared experiences emerge.

Lastly, the resulting situations of the Army, Buffalo soldiers, Sioux and Cheyenne in the years after armed conflict subsided in the 1880's and then all resistance after the massacre at Wounded Knee in late December of 1890, highlights the lasting impacts of this time twenty-five years of chaos and violence. This thesis works to illuminate both the unique and shared experiences of the buffalo soldiers, the army they served, and the Sioux and Cheyenne by examining the reminiscences of individuals, personal accounts, newspapers and military reports. The effects of conflicts on the Plains between 1865 and 1890 last into today and are important to study to understand the history of America and all of its people, including those who do not fit the mold of "whiteness."

Introduction

If you could take a photograph at that time, you have one world. And it is a world that is full of good things as far as the Indians are concerned. Game is plentiful, their way of life is clearly established in terms of that landscape. But just off the picture plane, you know, there are these things that are about to descend upon that world. And for the Indian, they are very bad. The culture is severely threatened. Because of people from outside who are coming in. And their attitude is that even this world is not big enough for both of us.

N. Scott Momaday, Native American Writer

When one thinks the “American West,” a multitude of ideas and images come to mind. The average white American might automatically think of the classic “Western” style movie produced in Hollywood such as *Stagecoach* or *Fort Apache*. With this come pictures of a vast empty landscape dotted with tumbleweeds and large rock formations and desperate skirmishes and chases between Indians and the “good guys”. One imagine pioneers, cowboys, buffalo and Indians and all that would be in Buffalo Bill’s “Wild West Show.” Adults might remember playing games like cowboys and Indians. A scholar or historian might mention to Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis” or assert that “manifest destiny” was the cause of American expansion. They might talk about “Indians” in less generic terms, instead referring to the Cheyenne or the Sioux. They would talk of the violence of each specific war fought between the US government and Indian Nations. They could argue about what constitutes a massacre and whether this term should be given to the military engagements at both Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee.

One main theme that stands out in all of these ideas, is that of chaos and violence. When beginning to look at the research and literature written on the Western Frontier, these elements of violence and chaos immediately shine through and specific groups begin to emerge. The two that play the most prominent role, are the US Army and the Indian Nations such as the Cheyenne and

Sioux, they fought to subdue. However, neither of these were homogenous entities. Within the US Army, African American soldiers, popularly known as the “Buffalo Soldiers” played an important role on the frontier and they are vastly understudied. Their experiences differ from those of white US soldiers in some important ways. Many Indian nations lived in the “West.” By looking at the experiences of the Cheyenne and the Sioux, one gets a special insight into some of the wars fought. These groups are all vastly different and merit studies done on them individually. However, the U.S. Army, Buffalo Soldiers, Plains Indian Nations such as the Sioux and the Cheyenne interacted with each other in prominent ways. There is no denying that their clashes shaped their individual experiences and made them distinct from one another. Therefore it is important to consider these groups together and look at their shared experiences. Each group may have reacted differently to the events that brought them together. But they all dealt with violence, loss of life and property and grappled with their cultural, racial and individual identities. All together, these factors shaped the lives of the US army soldiers, buffalo soldiers and American Indians. By looking at what makes these individual experiences unique, there is a possibility that shared, mutual feelings of suffering and endurance might emerge.

Experiences of the Eastern Sioux and Cheyenne During the Civil War

When the Civil War ended in 1865, hope for an era of peace that would befall of the newly reunited States was felt across the country. The wish would not come true for many of those living in America. The realities of life for a “peacetime” country would fall short of coming true for those living out on the Western Plains. While some American Indians such as the Cherokee and the Choctaw fought alongside the Confederacy in the Civil War, others were waging their own independent wars and rebellions against the Federal Government during the Civil War years.

In 1862, angry from blatant abuse and corruption that racked the federal Indian system, the Eastern Sioux of Minnesota rebelled against the government and a bloody war followed.¹ The Eastern Sioux were eventually defeated and their Minnesota based reservation was lost and some escaped into the Dakota Territory pursued by the U.S. Army intent on subduing them onto reservations. By the summer of 1864, a war was being waged between the government and the Cheyenne living in Colorado. The leader of the Southern Cheyenne, Black Kettle, attempted to negotiate a peace before the coming winter but this bloody conflict reached its horrendous climax at what would become known as the Sand Creek Massacre. Black Kettle had made camp in the valley of Sand Creek where he and his band were besieged by the Third Colorado Cavalry, lead by Colonel John M. Chivington. Chivington attacked with no apparent cause and no mercy was to be had, as “men, women, children, and even infants perished in the orgy of slaughter.”² During the Civil War years, with the main focus was on the war raging between the North and South in the East, the decision making on how to best deal with the Plains Indians was left to military leaders, and therefore the “generals almost by default had made U.S. Indian Policy overwhelmingly a military policy.”³ However, with disasters such as Sand Creek, and General John Pope’s largely unsuccessful 1865 campaign in the Plains a new strategy was beginning to form. This new initiative would ultimately become what would be known as President Grant’s “Indian Peace Policy” in 1868.

In 1865, the Civil War had mercifully ended and negotiations on how to rebuild and reunite were under way in the East. Indian Nations were not immune from the immediate effects of Reconstruction, especially the Five Civilized Tribes that fought on the side of the

¹ Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier: 1846-1890*, Revised Ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2003) 78-81.

² Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 89-92.

³ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 93.

Confederacy. This shaped the way that Indians interacted with newly emancipated slaves. While certain nations such as the Creeks and Cherokee owned black slaves, before Reconstruction Indians and Blacks “had previously lived in relative harmony.”⁴ Indians struggled to establish how they fit into the new racial hierarchy that was formed after the war. For some Indians, such as planters, freed slaves threatened their economic and political status as “emancipation created a serious labor problem,” but for other non-slave holding Indians, emancipation offered hope because it “appeared to undermine the hierarchy that subjugated dark-skinned people.”⁵ Not only did emancipation change the link between Indians and African Americans but it also altered the relationship between Indians and each other. This created tense race relations between two oppressed peoples as they formed new relationships with each other and the white population.

By the end of the Civil War, interest in the West grew due to increasing economic demands. The opening of the Bozeman Trail in 1864, was a great source of conflict between the U.S. government and the Sioux Nation that lived in the Black Hills. Many settlers seeking to become rich off of the gold found in the area, sought protection from the U.S. Army while traveling to Montana via the trail.⁶ Many more would follow in hopes of finding “gold or silver, cattle, timber, agriculture, commerce, or politics.”⁷ In order to facilitate this movement, the government built a system of transcontinental railroads, the first of which was completed in 1869.⁸ The rail lines often cut through Indian territories causing clashes between Nations and the government. Indians were not the only ones in the way of the railroads and everyone who came

⁴ David A. Grinde, Jr. and Taylor, Quintard, “Red vs. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907,” *American Indian Quarterly*, 8:3 (Summer, 1984): 211.

⁵ Claudio Saunt, “The Paradox of Freedom: Tribal Sovereignty and Emancipation during the Reconstruction of Indian Territory,” in *The Journal of Southern History*: 20 (2004) 63-94.

⁶ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 99.

⁷ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 100.

⁸ Colin G. Calloway ed., *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012), 346.

with them. The Buffalo herds, which were the main source of food and material to the nations living on the Plains, were slaughtered as locomotives plowed through their habitat.⁹ Buffalo provided the basis of the culture of the Cheyenne and Sioux. Not only was the very land that they lived on threatened by outside sources but the buffalo that gave the Indians their source of life of the lands were being systematically slaughtered.

Black Soldiers in the Civil War

Black soldiers played a crucial role in the Civil War, which is now more widely known thanks to a Hollywood film, *Glory* starring Denzel Washington. While in the Union army, black soldiers experienced racism during the war and many black soldiers were looked down upon by their fellow white soldiers. Slaves that reached the Union lines in the South were categorized as contraband, and “while some Yanks treated contraband with a degree of equity or benevolence, the more typical response was indifference, contempt, or cruelty.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, escaped slaves lived in “contraband camps” and “by the second year of the war, the Union Army employed thousands of contrabands as laborers.”¹¹ President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation under immense criticism on January 1, 1863, thus freeing slaves living in rebel states. How these slaves would claim their freedom was left up to them. One of the more immediate effects of the Emancipation Proclamation was the enlistment of black men into the Union Army. Before the Proclamation, black men had been gradually enlisting in the military, mostly in Navy, because at the beginning of the war the War Department refused to allow black men to enlist.¹² However, by May of 1863 the federal government established the Bureau of Colored Troops to organize the influx of black volunteers in the Union Army. During desperate times even the Confederacy

⁹ Calloway, *First Peoples*, 346-347.

¹⁰ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989) 497.

¹¹ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 43.

¹² McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 563.

considered arming slaves in the final years of the war as a last attempt to avoid defeat but this idea angered many Southerners as they “apparently preferred to lose the war than win it with the help of a black man.”¹³

The racism that the United States Colored Troops faced during the Civil War, such as unequal pay, did not cease with the end of the war. Whites were threatened by the idea of armed black soldiers and “worried over the social and political implication of allowing black into the military. During the war, black soldiers were “disproportionally assigned to labor rather than combat,” but they also fought and died in battles such as the Battle of Fort Wagner where the “nearly half” of the Massachusetts Fifty-Fourth died in combat.¹⁴ Eric Foner writes that it was not until the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation that the “recruitment of black soldiers began in earnest,” and a large portion of these men were escaped slaves who joined the Union Army in the South.¹⁵ Foner argues that emancipated slaves’ participation in the army “offers only one illustration of the way black military service powerfully affected race relations.”¹⁶

Nonetheless, James McPherson argues that at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, the idea of arming blacks and allowing them to serve as soldiers in the military was not an original, nor new idea from President Lincoln.¹⁷ Black soldiers more often than not, encountered unequal treatment, and faced the reality that if captured they could be sold back into slavery or punished by death. Unequal pay between white and black soldiers gave blacks an opportunity to speak out for equal treatment.¹⁸ McPherson adds that black soldiers did not suddenly change the

¹³ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 835.

¹⁴ Foner, *Forever Free*, 52-53.

¹⁵ Foner, *Forever Free*, 52.

¹⁶ Foner, *Forever Free*, 53.

¹⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 563.

¹⁸ Foner, *Forever Free*, 55.

racist attitudes that many northerners held before and during the war.¹⁹ Foner also argues that perhaps the most important aspect of black military service during the war was that it helped to shape the place that blacks would have in society after the war, and “placed the question of black citizenship on the national agenda” in the post-war years.²⁰ McPherson agrees on this point but also states “helping blacks to earn citizenship was not the main motive” for congress to pass an act allowing for the enlistment of blacks in the Army, but rather it was an attempt to fill labor intensive positions in order to allow for whites to serve in combat positions.²¹ Foner also writes that the experience of fighting often was a liberating one.

Black soldiers continued to face challenges when continuing their service and “were assigned to posts on the frontier in 1865 and 1866.”²² The Army Reorganization Act of 1866 created the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry and the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first infantry regiments—all black units. Another Army Reorganization Act in 1869, combined these infantry regiments into the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth.²³ The origin of the term “Buffalo Soldier” is largely up for debate but the men in these units referred to this term with pride and made it their own. Buffalo soldiers served all over the West but the “majority of their posts were in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain states.”²⁴ Their duties mainly pertained the upkeep and guarding of forts but they also engaged in fighting with different Indian nations. Although, “cavalrymen expended most of their efforts fighting Indians, infantrymen devoted their attention

¹⁹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 565.

²⁰ Foner, *Forever Free*, 53.

²¹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 564.

²² Monroe Lee Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West, 1865-1900,” in *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, ed. Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Hardway (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 56.

²³ Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West,” 56.

²⁴ Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West,” 56.

to necessary but mundane day-to-day activities in and around their isolated and lonely posts.”²⁵

The Ninth and Tenth predominantly served in Kansas and Texas but also fought in other states such as Arizona, New Mexico and the Dakotas. This brought them into conflict with the Apache and to a lesser extent, the Sioux.

The US Army in the Years After the War

When the Civil War ended, it was hoped that an era of relative peace would befall the United States and thus the size of the army could be reduced to that of a peacetime army. This reduction of the army and “the continued marginalization of the regular army and militia service during the 1870s reflected a decline in the relevance of military service as a proof of manhood.”²⁶ During the Civil War, soldiers on both sides “believed they were fighting to preserve the heritage of republican liberty.”²⁷ One soldier from New Jersey wrote “we will be held responsible before God if we don’t do our part in helping to transmit this boon of civil & religious liberty down to succeeding generations.” A man from North Carolina, was “willing to give up [his] life in defence of [his] Home and Kindred.”²⁸ These men were not unique in believing they were fighting for the highest of ideals during the war, and this sentiment garnered a certain amount of respect from the public. However after the war, instead of being viewed as a respectable line of work where a man could achieve honor and glory, fighting in the Army no longer seemed like a prestigious position. Soldiers on the Western frontier in the years after the war were seen in the public eye, perhaps more sharply in the East, as “wastrels and immigrants and drunks who lay around western forts and massacred Indians.”²⁹ This idea of the fallen soldier; one who has been

²⁵ Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West,” 57.

²⁶ James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 251.

²⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 309-310.

²⁸ Both soldiers are quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 309-310.

²⁹ Marten, *Sing Not War*, 251.

irredeemably scarred and broken, both physically and psychologically, from their experiences in the war, has also been popularized in Hollywood films such as *Stagecoach* and *The Magnificent Seven*. However, it is hard to find specific literature on the origins of this troupe.

The path for a man to make a name for himself now lay in the realm of politics rather than war.³⁰ The road to reconciliation after the war was a near insurmountable task and some scholars argue that with the white ex-confederates' increasing anger at being disenfranchised and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, Reconstruction largely failed which led to a Jim Crow South. Many soldiers were ordered westward to put down Indian uprisings instead of being sent home at the end of the war, much to their "supreme dismay."³¹ When enlisting in the army at the time "virtually none of [the volunteers] had frontier service in mind... and were appalled when they learned of their assignments."³² The frontier was not a desired place to be at the close of the Civil War. Elements of racial distrust colored the interactions between white and black soldiers, and their interactions with Indian warriors on the Great Plains.

Literature Review:

Shared experiences among the US Army, Buffalo soldiers, and the Sioux and Cheyenne is surprisingly understudied. While each group has a significant amount of scholarship on their individual experience, there seems little to no effort to unify these groups into one common story. The study of the US Army between 1866 through 1890 has been largely through an "us versus them" frame, meaning early twentieth-century scholarship looks at the Indians as one singular category of uncivilized humans, and very little was published about the "buffalo soldiers." The experiences of individual nations are largely ignored and the history is taught

³⁰ Marten, *Sing Not War*, 251.

³¹ James M. Bartek, "Nothing but the Sky Overhead and the Prairie Underfoot': Civil War Soldiers on the Frontier," *Military History of the West*, Vol. 43 (2014): 2.

³² Bartek, "Nothing but the Sky Overhead," 3.

largely through the scope of a timeline, with studies moving from treaty to treaty and skirmish to engagement. In the years following the Civil Rights Movement and the Native American Movement, historians have focused more on the experiences of the native peoples and become critical of the army. Examples of such scholars are Robert Utley, who largely completed his works during the seventies and eighties and Dee Brown's now popular book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* was published in 1970. Scholarship continued through the nineties but has largely tapered off in the new millennium.

In his book, *The Indian Frontier*, originally published in 1984, Utley argues that the expansion west by white settlers after the Civil War was "irresistible" and the government "could not deflect it if they wanted" regardless of how many Indians lay in the way, and this led to an "ambivalent" approach to the construction of Indian policy as the government could not exercise influence over the mass emigration of settlers.³³ Dee Brown, writing in 1970, describes these settlers as having "driven a hole through the Indian country."³⁴ He also takes a sympathetic approach to describing Indian relations during the Civil War by stating that during the war, "Cheyenne and Arapaho hunting parties found it increasingly difficult to stay clear of Bluecoat soldiers who were scouting southward in search of Graycoats," implying that the southern Cheyenne were actively trying to avoid conflict with the government but inevitably the U.S. Army found them.³⁵ How best to deal with the Indian Nations that were in the path of this massive wave of white immigration, consisted of a plan that congress could not decide on.

Collin Calloway builds on this sentiment of a force beyond the government's control by stating that expansion west represented, to both the government and the people, a way to "help

³³ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 100.

³⁴ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970) 68.

³⁵ Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 69.

restore the nation's unity and heal its wounds" after the Civil War.³⁶ Calloway argues that the reasoning behind making treaties was to end the immediate conflict in order to create a less hostile environment for eastern settlers. However, it is important to note that Calloway's writings in his book, *First Peoples*, are intended to be part of a textbook. This implies that Calloway is drawing from other secondary sources instead of primary ones as Utley and Brown would have used. Dee Brown writes that the treaties signed in the 1850's, in particular the treaty signed at Fort Laramie, "permit[ted] the Americans to establish roads and military post across" the territory of the Cheyenne, Arapahos, Sioux, and Crow among other nations however, they did not relinquish their rights to hunt and move freely around.³⁷ Eventually treaties would take a different approach to solving the conflict; they would establish peace by "confining the Indians on reservation where they could be segregated, supervised, and educated in 'civilized' ways."³⁸

Utley writes of the impressive leadership and prowess of Red Cloud, an Oglala warrior, claiming that "his commanding influence rested on genuine merit."³⁹ In contrast, Brown and Calloway argue that young warriors played leadership roles. Calloway writes that leadership within in the Sioux eventually was taken by younger warriors such as Crazy Horse and Sitting bull "who advocated uncompromising resistance against American expansion and colonialism," Red Cloud being among them, as their people became increasingly frustrated the policy of signing treaties.⁴⁰ Brown echoes this sentiment of frustration by stating that Cheyenne leaders were trying "to keep their young men busy hunting buffalo away from the white men's routes of travel," which implies these leaders were concerned over potential clashes between the young warriors and the soldiers. Writing much later in 2016, Peter Cozzens agrees with Calloway and

³⁶Calloway, *First Peoples*, 341.

³⁷Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 68.

³⁸ Calloway, *First Peoples*, 345.

³⁹ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 99.

⁴⁰ Calloway, *First Peoples*, 346.

Brown when writing about the leadership capabilities of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, praising them as very capable leaders, thus continuing the trend of giving more credit to Indian leaders over discussing the internal failures of the military to explain military disasters.⁴¹ Utley makes mention that the land in the Black Hills that Red Cloud and the Teton Sioux were defending was won in wars fought with the Crow, however in the years after the Civil War the Sioux were claiming it as their ancestral homeland.⁴² Cozzens also mentions this irony, of the myth of the West being that some of the Indian nations who fought for the Great Plains had only lived there for a relatively short time.⁴³ Brown comments that after the massacre at Sand Creek it seemed as if the northern Cheyenne and the Sioux appeared to be very close at the time, and although they were different in terms of their laws and customs “these Indians had come to think of themselves as the People, confident of their power and sure of their right to live as they pleased.”⁴⁴ This speaks to the “us versus them” sentiment that was building between white settlers and the Cheyenne and Sioux. How black soldiers would fit into this dynamic and what side they would be closer to was unclear and to be determined.

There is a lack of scholarship in regards to the Buffalo Soldiers. Once African American studies came into existence in the post-Civil Rights period, the study of black soldiers became more popular. The interest in this topic seems to have been able to sustain itself into more recent years despite the limited primary sources to draw from. In *Buffalo Soldiers in the American West*, Monroe Lee Billington argues that because “colored troops” fought with such valor during the Civil War, “black leaders and their white supporters advocated that blacks be permitted to

⁴¹ Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping; The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016) 192-195.

⁴² Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 99.

⁴³ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 47.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 97.

enlist in the postwar army.”⁴⁵ Scholars such as Bruce Glasrud focus on the relationships between black soldiers and their white commanding officers. Glasrud argues that although buffalo soldiers did face antagonism, their commanding white officers who willingly accepted command of black troops, often “treated black soldiers equitably [and] appreciated the bravery and dedication of black soldiers.”⁴⁶ Other scholars such as Frank Schubert agree that the black regiments were good soldiers who distinguished themselves in service even in the face of racism and bigotry expressed by both their fellow soldiers and the communities they sought to protect.⁴⁷

Opinions differ among scholars on the role of the U.S. Army on the Western Frontier in the years after the Civil War up until 1900. In the past, there was a focus on the Army and the specific engagements they encountered with the Sioux and Cheyenne. General George Armstrong Custer was raised to an almost mythic status; however, it can be argued that this was done largely in the realm of public opinion and not necessarily in the eyes of academics. Robert Wooster, writing in 1988, contends that in the years following the Civil War, the army struggled to redefine its role in the country and this was magnified in the West as the government and army “struggled to define and implement a general policy applicable in vastly differing environments and against widely dissimilar Indian tribes.”⁴⁸ Wooster also argues that the Army was unable to focus its full attention of shaping its’ Indian Affairs policies due to “Reconstruction, civil disputes, international problems, and natural disasters” and effective policy-making was difficult to achieve due to the “unique military problems posed by hostile tribes” that military structure of

⁴⁵ Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West,” 56.

⁴⁶ Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles, eds. *Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black Soldiers Anthology* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2007) 32.

⁴⁷ Frank Schubert, ed. *Voices of the Buffalo Soldier: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2003) 85-86.

⁴⁸ Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy: 1865-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 13.

command made hard to address.⁴⁹ Wooster agrees with Utley when furthering the thought that the federal government simply did not think of trouble with Indians as an important a issue as the Reconstruction of the South was and thus left it mostly to military leaders and stating that the confusion over the line of authority allowed for generals and high ranking officers to take an active and often autonomous role in shaping Indian policy.⁵⁰ Utley also points out that “the army as an institution never evolved a doctrine of Indian warfare,” thus never teaching West Point cadets the differences of conventional and unconventional warfare, leaving new officers to learn on the job how to engage with Indians without the leadership of past officers.⁵¹ Utley builds on this when he writes of the dramatic difference of opinions between the East and the West when deciding on Indian policies. The East appeared to recognize the extreme violence and acquired a distaste for it after hearing of events such as the Sand Creek Massacre, thus resulting in the opinion of pursuing a diplomatic path to peaceful relations with Indian Nations. However, public opinion on the West “overwhelmingly favored the rifle, and their newspapers cried for extermination.”⁵² This issue also divided government with military and civil arms often not seeing eye to eye. This polarization of opinion also added to the trouble of creating a coherent federal Indian policy.

Scholars such as William H. Leckie take a slightly less critical approach to analyzing the Army and how they interacted with the Sioux and Cheyenne. Leckie frames Red Cloud as a belligerent leader who “scorn[ed] the government’s efforts to secure the [Bozeman Trail] by treaty,” thus pointing to Red Cloud choosing war over diplomacy.⁵³ Leckie argues that settlers

⁴⁹ Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 14.

⁵⁰ Wooster, *The Military and Untied States Indian Policy*, 24.

⁵¹ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 164.

⁵² Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 102.

⁵³ Robert H. Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 32.

and those working on the railroads had a right to be fearful and in need of military protection due to Indian massacres such as the Fetterman massacre in December of 1866.⁵⁴ However, Leckie also paints a picture of an army that was becoming increasingly paranoid that an Indian uprising was going to break out in the spring of 1866. Leckie does not offer support that this paranoia was well founded and even states that the General in charge, General Hancock, “neither visited the frontier nor held council with a single Indian,” however he remained convinced that a war was brewing and decided that “a strong force must be assembled and marched into Indian country to overawe the tribes if possible, or whip them if necessary.”⁵⁵ Writing in the early 1960’s Leckie’s argument, which agrees with the basic argument of Utley and Wooster but perhaps not as harshly written, that the way Generals were allowed to make decisions independently did not allow for a cohesive Indian Affairs policy which largely resulted in a chaotic warfare way of life out West, is more clearly stated in the writings of Utley and Wooster who researched the Army and Indian Affairs after the American Indian Rights Movement of the 1970’s, and thus writing during a time that was more favorable to the perspective of the Cheyenne and Sioux and more negative about the Army, with the Vietnam war raging in the 1960’s and early 70’s.

Edward Coffman also describes the concern over the role the army would have in the years after the Civil War, much like Wooster. Coffman writes that the Army found its place out West. He states that one of the most critical factors in shaping the Army after the Civil War was the disappearing frontier which, in his opinion was largely aided by the construction of railroads.⁵⁶ Coffman stresses that the “vanishing frontier” and the end of the Civil War were the

⁵⁴ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 33.

⁵⁵ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 38.

⁵⁶ Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime: 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 216.

“dominant influences” over the Army in the last half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ After the end of Reconstruction and the end of Indian hostilities, the Army was once again faced with uncertainty. However, unlike Rooster, Coffman argues that this ambiguity concerning the future resulted in “an improvement in the well-being as well as the training of soldiers and a general impetus toward professionalism in the officer corps,” thus pointing to the conclusion that the Army’s new purpose during peacetime was to be prepared for war.⁵⁸ All of these scholars point to a fear and confusion over the new role of the Army in the years following the war. This turmoil was aided by the ineffectual way that high-ranking officers decided to deal with immediate conflicts without following a cohesive policy across the entire American West. Violent and seemingly chaotic clashes with the Cheyenne and Sioux resulted from the tumult.

This topic merits more study as none of these scholars have attempted to compare each groups’ experience with the others. As most experiences in America are, life on the frontier was largely affected by race. There is very little scholarship comparing the experience of Indians and their struggles with racial identity and the struggles of soldiers, both white and black as they worked to redefine their relationship in a post slavery, yet increasingly racially divided America. While great strides were being made in sections of the South where blacks were attaining public office and voting, something they could never do as slaves, many African Americans were suffering great retributions at the hands of groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Many black public officials were “murdered by the Ku Klux Klan or kindred terrorist organizations during Reconstruction.”⁵⁹ This pattern of violence in a racially charged atmosphere was not segregated to exclusively the South. While race was not as prominent a factor in the West, societal tensions

⁵⁷ Coffman, *The Old Army*, 218.

⁵⁸ Coffman, *The Old Army*, 216.

⁵⁹ Foner, *Forever Free*, 134.

existed. And much like the Civil War, many often resorted to violence in order to work out these anxieties.

Primary Sources:

In some cases primary sources are scarce. The majority of them include military records and memoirs written after the fact. These memoirs are predominantly written by officers rather than enlisted men, and by whites rather than blacks. Officers have different experiences than the men they command. These memoirs are often much longer and do not always capture the mundaneness of day-to-day life that is often described in the secondary literature. There are shorter accounts written by soldiers. But again, these tend to be written after the fact. These writings often include descriptions of fights with Indians. However, the size of these clashes differ greatly from skirmishes to raids where casualties are low to substantial engagements with higher casualties. They are also very vague when referring to the Indians. Sometimes they will only mention what nation they fought or at the very most they will mention a famous leader such as Geronimo or Red Cloud. This makes it very difficult to compare soldiers' tales of interactions with Indians or Indian perspectives. This also leaves the stories of smaller nations out of the story as they do not have very famous leaders that have been written about such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. Only very significant battles such as Little Big Horn in 1876 and the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 are clearly recorded on both sides. Congressional records and War Department Records that have correspondence between Washington D.C. and forts', and forts and officers between each other, can also be useful in gaining an insight into the government policies at a specific time and how this was carried out.

Buffalo Soldiers by far, have the smallest number of primary sources due to a variety of potential reasons. Many soldiers were largely illiterate and only learned to read and write during

their time in the army, as the army placed emphasis on teaching the illiterate population. Another reason could be the relative lack of interest in “buffalo soldiers” until roughly the 1960’s. This could have allowed a lack of preservation of writings by black soldiers to persist. Most sources come from officers which, like stated before, have their limitations. Most of these accounts by officers come from the white commanding officers with a few writings by black officers. There are newspaper articles from the cities that the Calvary served around, such as Salt Lake City, that covered the arrival and departure of the black regiments. Newspapers can be highly sensationalized and are often very critical of black troops, and thus unreliable in reporting facts of events. However, with the emergence of African American run newspapers in the cities in which the buffalo soldiers served, there might be a way to balance out bias, in order to come to a consensus on actual events.

American Indian primary sources are not lacking. There are many translations of speeches given at treaty signings or other various events. Newspapers often translated and published these speeches. It is important to keep in mind that these are translations and often newspapers, or US Army officers to whom Indians dictated their view, would edit pieces. These documents are useful because they are often times spoken or written at the time of the event. Documents written after the event has occurred can convey a different experience when having the advantage of hindsight. Also, when giving a speech, speakers know that their words will be broadcasted to some sort of audience. This also affects the choices they make and what they choose to include and what they choose to leave out of their speeches. There are autobiographies by Indians, in particular the Sioux, who received white educations. In these books, many share their experiences of living in both Sioux and white society and share unique insights on the viewpoints of their culture. The Cheyenne and the Sioux were also a people who relied heavily

on oral tradition where stories and history is passed down from generation to generation with little change. This tradition can make it difficult to understand and find when researching in a culture that values written documents over the oral.

Conclusion:

The clash of cultures that occurred on the Western Plains in the latter half of the nineteenth century represent a larger theme that still plagues the United States today. The period that followed the Civil War was a time of immense and extreme change for everyone. Some groups were perhaps more affected than others: groups such as freed slaves and whites living in the South. Indian nations such as the Cheyenne and Sioux's experiences were often overlooked before a revival of American Indian studies after the Civil Rights and American Indian movements of the 1960's and 1970's. The change and uncertainty that gripped that nation in the late 1800's is often discussed, but the ways in which the nation worked out these new tensions are often ignored. Human nature often lends itself to violence to combat feelings of vulnerability and unpredictability. And this was so in the case of the Plains Indian Wars. What is interesting about the Cheyenne, Sioux, Buffalo soldiers, and U.S. Army is that they all were experiencing these same feelings, however, it is hard to see if they dealt with them and were effected by them in the same ways. Everyone one of these groups' lives were changed drastically and directly after the Civil War. The racial and societal tensions between these groups was worked out through violence and warfare which resulted in time of chaos and fear. What remains to be seen is if this is how cultural groups undergo change or if this is a uniquely American way to interact, American in the sense of all who lived there, expanding beyond white culture. Did this time of violence and chaos shape America or did Americans shape this time through violence and chaos?

Framing all three groups into one coherent yet jumbled picture may prove to be the best way to answer this question.

Chapter One

The Dawn of the New, A Twilight Over the Old: Post-Civil War Disarray, 1865-1873

We soon found that peace had its disappointments, as well as war.

Major General Zenas R. Bliss

Did I like the army? Yahsuh, I'd ruthih be in de army den a plantation slave.

William Watkins

Friends, it has been our misfortune to welcome the white man.

Red Cloud

It was the end of an era. The Civil War had torn apart the Union and the East began the slow process of reuniting and rebuilding. Part of this process would include establishing a new social order, particularly in the South. The ways of the old had been destroyed in the battles that had decided the fate of the nation. Very few lives were the same as they had been before the war. Although perhaps more keenly felt in the southeastern part of the country, this sentiment was true for those living out West. It was also a driving force for many who sought solace and escape in the West. Often, the solace sought turned into a life with much more hardship and misery than expected. For soldiers who continued their service in the army, some of whom were surprised by this, discovered that the army had a very different role when operating out West. Newly emancipated slaves found themselves masters of their own bodies but without a clear path to making the realities of true freedom come to be in their lives. And the Cheyenne and Sioux living in the Plains would have to prepare to fight for their very way of life, which would soon come under attack. Instead of being shaped by a largely immovable social order, life in the period after the Civil War would largely be influenced by the violent and chaotic way that groups filled the social vacuum that the end of slavery had created. The once solid and racially charged divides between economic status became more permeable in these years and thus provided for closer interactions between these groups in this period than ever before.

Yael Sternhell writes that the Civil War did not end over-night: there was not a clear decisive battle in which at the close, the victor had won the war. The great rebellion of the South ended “in a slow process of disintegration.”⁶⁰ In 1865, Confederate soldiers started on the long journey home. This march homewards provided for powerful imagery of “not only the defeat of a nation, but also the decline of a ruling class.”⁶¹ White men were no longer clearly on the highest rung of the social ladder in the South. Sent to Charleston, South Carolina after the close of the war, Union Major General Zenas R. Bliss, who would become a commanding officer to the Twenty-fourth infantry, writes in his memoir that “it is very difficult to give a description of affairs in that section that would give a correct state of society.”⁶² Bliss described himself as “the court of last resort, and all matters of dispute were brought to me as judge,” as “the state was under martial law, and the officers of the [Union] army were in entire control of everything.”⁶³ A Northern “Yankee” now sat at the head of the local justice system. Bliss also remarked that as assistant commissioner of Freedmen and Abandoned Lands for the area, he heard a lot of cases between “the landowners and the laborers, Negroes, [who] seemed to have no confidences in their former masters.”⁶⁴ Damaged, broken, and defeated, Southern soldiers came home to a very different world, in which a new social order was struggling to emerge.

Some Union troops from Illinois, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, expecting their service to have ended, found themselves marching to the Western Plains.⁶⁵ This angered many troops including the Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry who initially refused to serve in the

⁶⁰ Yael Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) 156.

⁶¹ Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 166.

⁶² Zenas R. Bliss, *The Reminiscences of Major General Zenas R. Bliss, 1854-1876: From the Texas Frontier to the Civil War and Back Again!*, ed. Thomas T. Smith, Jerrt D. Thompson, Robert Wooster and Ben E. Pingent (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2007) 388.

⁶³ Zenas R. Bliss, *The Reminiscences of Major General Zenas R. Bliss*, 388.

⁶⁴ Zenas R. Bliss, *The Reminiscences of Major General Zenas R. Bliss*, 388.

⁶⁵ James M. Bartek, “‘Nothing but the Sky Overhead and the Prairie Underfoot’: Civil War Soldiers on the Frontier,” *Military History of the West*, Vol. 43 (2014): 2.

Power River Expedition in the late summer of 1865, when they believed they had completed their service to the Union. They eventually followed their orders after the General they had been assigned to had “threat[ened] to blow them to pieces with artillery.”⁶⁶ There was no glory to be won in the West. The army was no longer fighting to ensure that “their nation under God would not perish”, but rather faced the miserable and sometimes tedious task of fighting with Indians, a job no one looked highly upon. The geography of the Plains made the army conduct campaigns “in a remote and rugged environment that presented special logistical challenges,” and made marches torture for the soldiers, thus, many deserted.⁶⁷ The very environment of the Plains created an atmosphere as adverse towards coming soldiers as the soldiers felt towards it.

The army in in the West also lacked public support in the East after events like the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864 and then later in 1868, the Massacre at Washita continued this view.⁶⁸ The public had seen enough warfare and were not keen on encouraging more. The *Cadiz Sentinel* of Ohio, writing in August of 1865, published an article that contained General Alexander McCook’s personal opinion on Sand Creek. Fresh from a tour to New Mexico and Colorado, McCook is recorded as stating “it was the most cold-blooded, revolting, diabolical atrocity ever conceived by man or devil.”⁶⁹ McCook continued on to describe the horrendous acts of violence that occurred there and finished by providing the opinion that “the flag and uniform of the United States were disgraced by acts of fiendish barbarity.”⁷⁰ The *Cadiz Sentinel* also stressed the innocence of the Cheyenne who were murdered, for they “had voluntarily, intrusted themselves to the protection of the Government.” It praised Black Kettle as a benevolent leader whose “trust

⁶⁶ Bartek, “Nothing but the Sky Overhead,” 3.

⁶⁷ Bartek, “Nothing but the Sky Overhead,” 5.

⁶⁸ Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016) 28.

⁶⁹ “General McCook on the Sand Creek Massacre,” *The Cadiz Sentinel*, August 30, 1865.

⁷⁰ “General McCook on the Sand Creek Massacre,” *The Cadiz Sentinel*, August 30, 1865.

was repaid by indiscriminate massacre; his friendship was rewarded by outrage on the living and disfigurement of the dead; his confidence requited by betrayal.”⁷¹ Black Kettle’s relations with the army did not improve. In 1868, under the Medicine Lodge treaties, all Indians were to report to their reservations. On November 27, 1868, Black Kettle’s village was attacked by a cavalry force led by George Custer. When the smoke cleared both Black Kettle and his wife lay dead among the bodies of other women and children.⁷² Newspapers once again published the event as a massacre. On December 28, 1868, the *Ohio Statesman* noted that there has been “an indefinite amount of gossip to prove that Black Kettle and his band were on the war path.” The article concludes with the author asserting he will “vindicate the character of this dead savage, and offer some cogent reasons for the belief that an innocent band of Indians have been put to the sword.”⁷³ For some, the Civil War was a time where the army were fighting for slaves who could not fight for themselves, but Washita represented an extreme change where the army was not defending people but rather were engaging in the slaughter of a defenseless and trusting people.

While the public in the East reprimanded the army for engaging in blood-thirsty slaughter, many of those who lived in frontier towns often complained of the military’s incapability to protect them. Local governments called for more troops to help protect their settlements. However, the army lacked the numbers and provisions to occupy everywhere that called for their presence. General William T. Sherman wrote a letter that was published in a Cheyenne, Wyoming newspaper in 1869. Here, he attempts to explain the role of the army by reminding the public that “all Indians are lawfully under the control of the Interior Department,

⁷¹ “General McCook on the Sand Creek Massacre,” *The Cadiz Sentinel*, August 30, 1865.

⁷² Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier, 1846-1890*, Revised Ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) 124-125.

⁷³ Geo. W. Manypenny, “Our Indian Complications—No. 4.” *The Ohio Statesman*, December 28, 1868.

by and through civilian agents, [his] soldiers have no right to anticipate Indian hostilities.”⁷⁴ He also, to a certain extent, chides the public for their unrealistic expectations of his role in the military. He writes, “nearly all the people on the Plains, even the governors of the states and territories, who ought to know better, seem to have an idea that I have a right to make war and peace at pleasure. I possess none of these powers.”⁷⁵ Sherman goes on to list the vast amount of territories, “over eight thousand miles of traveled road” and “tens of thousands of miles of frontier settlements” he is expected to protect with the “small force” that has been assigned to him by Congress. Sherman even goes so far as to say, “each of these settlements exaggerates its own importance and appeals for help” and reminds the public that he and the rest of the army are held accountable to Congress and “not to the people [on the Frontier] who neglect [the army’s] advice and counsel.” This surely did not help public opinion of the army. He also takes the opportunity to criticize Congress for its “yearly threats of further reductions,” thus alienating himself from the federal as well as the local government. In the years after the Civil War, the army found itself in a curious position, comprised of men who largely did not want to be there. Criticized not only by a civilian population on the Plains who complained they were not doing enough, but also and by the public who criticized them for using excessive force, the army looked to the federal government who had its attentions focused back East on the trials of Reconstruction, for instructions.

Life for recruits was tough and there seemed to be little higher purpose to be found in army that was not waging a clear war against distinct and homogenous enemy. Recruits could no longer see themselves as fighting to ensure their nation’s survival. For the men who fought in the Civil War, their ranks in the army offered them the chance to wield more power than they ever

⁷⁴ William T. Sherman, “We Do Our Duty According To Our Means,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Indian and the Army*, ed. Peter Cozzens (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2005) 2-4.

⁷⁵ Sherman, “We Do Our Duty According To Our Means,” 3.

thought possible. The opportunities that Civil War provided men were a far cry from the ones afforded to the frontier army.⁷⁶ When it came time to reenlist in the army after the war, many applied for a regular commission. Congress intended to give most new commissions to men who had at least two years of “distinguished” service as officer or soldier volunteers during the war, however, this excluded men who had fought for the Confederacy.⁷⁷ Lauren W. Aldrich, a man who served as a sergeant in the Thirtieth U.S. Infantry between 1867 and 1870, reminisced that “about 75% of the recruits had served in the Civil War and knew something of the discipline,” all enlisting from Kentucky.⁷⁸ However Aldrich, while serving in the years almost immediately after the war, may have been surrounded by men who fought against him and the Kentuckians in the war. As the years passed and America became farther removed from the war years, recruits were less likely to have military experience. Men did not enlist in the frontier army hoping to gain honor and respect but rather were seeking a way out of their poverty-stricken lives, either on desolate farms or in urban centers. The image and composition of the army had greatly changed along with its very size in the years following the Civil War.

For both North and South, the army was no longer an honorable or distinguished occupation. Most thought of the frontier army as being “made up of professional officers and ... the immigrant refuse of eastern cities.”⁷⁹ The next generation choose not to prove their manhood through warfare but rather choose politics as a worthy and in their time comparable, field.⁸⁰ Those fighting out on the Plains were seen as having a drastically different character than in the

⁷⁶ Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 215-216.

⁷⁷ Coffman, *The Old Army*, 219.

⁷⁸ Jerome Greene, *Indian War Veterans: Memories of Army Life and Campaigns in the West, 1864-1898* (Havertown, U.S.: Savas Beatie, 2007) 91.

⁷⁹ James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Caroline Press, 2011) 251.

⁸⁰ Marten, *Sing Not War*, 251.

past. While previously “the Civil War soldier was defined by the Victorian ideal of self-control” some supposed the frontier soldier had taken the “opportunity to cast off civilized” restraints and embraced the frontier life.⁸¹ The army was no longer made up of “sober and purposeful volunteers.”⁸² Recruits were often uneducated and resorted to drinking and gambling as way to pass the often monotonous time. When talking of his time as a recruit at Fort Clark, a corporal remembered the town surrounding the fort as a place where “the roulette wheels were spinning day and night, and faro games, studhorse, and poker games ran continuously.” The town itself was “a typical cowboy town, wild and woolly, having one-half dozen saloons and gambling halls.”⁸³ All of this added to the increasingly negative view of the professional soldier in the frontier army in the years after the Civil War.

The way that some newly minted soldiers choose to spend their down time was not the only factor working against them in the public eye. Adding to the public’s negative view, was the fact that a large portion, one-third, of regiments were made up of immigrants, mainly of German or Irish decent.⁸⁴ The men came from vastly different backgrounds, many of them poor immigrants from urban cities in the East. In an 1876 campaign to disarm the Agency Sioux along the Missouri River, a man named Theodore W. Goldin of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry remembered a group of recruits who had arrived to “fill [their] sadly depleted ranks.” Goldin described them as “a cosmopolitan bunch... English, Irish, Scotch, Italians, and French, with a goodly share of Americans.” They were of all ages and “from all parts of the country, from farms, mines, cities, and towns” and perhaps most importantly, “not one with the slightest idea of army life.” Goldin

⁸¹ Bartek, “Nothing But the Sky Overhead,” 20.

⁸² Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 54.

⁸³ Jerome Greene, *Indian War Veterans: Memories of Army Life and Campaigns in the West, 1864-1898* (Havertown, U.S.: Savas Beatie, 2007) 35.

⁸⁴ Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping; The Epic Story of the Indian Wars For the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016) 54.

added that his entire troop “really felt sorry for them.”⁸⁵ Goldin gives no indication that he held any prejudices against these men, much unlike the attitude of the public at the time.

Captain Charles King offers a different perspective on the diverse nature of the new army. Captain King served under General George Cook during his 1876 campaign against the Sioux in the Northern Plains. King describes his company as being made up of “a mixed array of nationalities,” viewing this as being a positive influence on the troop. King believed that having diverse group created an atmosphere that

Balance[s] one another out as it were – the phlegmatic Teuton and the fiery Celt, mercurial Gaul and stolid Anglo-Saxon . Dashed and strongly tintured with the clear-headed individuality of the American, they make up a company which for *personnel* is admirably adapted to the wants of our democratic service.⁸⁶

King makes sure to establish that this balancing act only works when there is the influence of “the clear-headed individuality of the American” and although he describes his company as being “diverse” it is still a company made up of white European men, showing that race still played a large role in military life.

King takes a unique, if not misguided approach to describing the black units. While he praises them by characterizing the men of the Tenth Cavalry as “sixty of the very best darkies that ever stole chickens,” he mentions these units first by stating, “in four regiments only is exclusiveness as to race permitted by law. Only darkies can join their ranks.”⁸⁷ By describing the black units in this way, King seems to be overlooking the fact that black men were not allowed to join other regiments, thus creating the need for the four segregated ranks. White men were not excluded from joining the Ninth or Tenth Cavalry Units but rather black men were not permitted

⁸⁵Greene, *Indian War Veterans*, 147.

⁸⁶ Charles King, *Campaigning With Crook and Stories of Army Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, 1890) 8.

⁸⁷ King, *Campaigning With Crook*, 8.

to join any other cavalry unit. Once again this offers unique insight into how ideas of race played out differently across army units and highlights the misunderstandings between the races.

For many the West was an almost mythical place full of opportunity. In the final days of the war and for months to come after surrender, many Southerners believed that although “[their] army and government might be beaten but [The West with its] land and its magnitude, could not be.”⁸⁸ Although charged with keeping the peace between settlers and Indians, the army found itself on opposite sides of fights with the Indians. In 1863, John Bozeman established a trail towards the eastern base of the Bighorn Mountains to pursue the newly found gold in the southwestern region of the Montana Territory.⁸⁹ The trail opened up a path for miners to reach this gold. The trail would have profound effects on the Sioux Nation and provide the basis of what would become known as Red Cloud’s War. By 1866, a deluge of settlers flocked to the Montana territory and the West in general, hoping to find relief from the economic downturn in the East. Many panhandled for gold, worked on railroads or fought to establish farms. This gave the frontier army “the dual role of gate-keeper and guardian of the westering population of a nation suddenly delivered from internecine war and bursting with energy.”⁹⁰ The army found itself attempting to work out its new role as both enemy and protector of the Sioux and Cheyenne nations.

White men were not the only ones experiencing change when it came to military service. Newly emancipated slaves found their lives drastically altered in the spring of 1865. In the most ideal of realities, blacks now had control over their own bodies and thus their destinations. But the way to attaining a comfortable and free life was often blocked, especially in the South. Black codes and the formation of Jim Crow laws prevented African Americans from voting, and

⁸⁸ Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 189.

⁸⁹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 33.

⁹⁰ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 30.

reduced them back into a state similar to slavery with the rise of sharecropping. While the early days of Reconstruction were filled with hope among newly freed slaves, it's ultimate failure crushed the dreams of a better life for the children of slaves. After proving themselves fighting in segregated regiments, commanded by white officers in the Union Army, blacks were allowed admission into the post-Civil War army with the Army Reorganization Act of 1866. This established two cavalry units, the Ninth and Tenth, and four infantry regiments which were later combined into two, the Twenty-fourth and the Twenty-fifth. Many young black men enlisted, seeing the army as way that could "afford [them] an opportunity for social and economic betterment difficult to achieve in a society all but closed to them."⁹¹ Many of those who enlisted were born into slavery.

William Watkins and William Branch were such men and their stories speak to the great change and displacement that freed slaves experienced in the years after the Civil War. Watkins and Branch shared their stories with the Works Progress Administration Slave Narrative Project, which collected stories from 1936-1938, thus Watkins and Branch are speaking many years after the end of their respective service. Watkins was born on a plantation near Richmond, Virginia. He spoke of the hardships of slavery, stating that although his Master was "good but de overseers' rough. He whip[ed] all de slaves." Watkins also mentioned the patrols that worked to prevent and capture run-away slaves, thus serving as reminder to Watkins that although he was "fortunate" to have a "good" master he still was very much not a free man. Watkins expressed feelings of uncertainty and displacement when the war was over. Instead of describing a feeling of freedom, Watkins recalled the end of the War as when "dey turn[ed] us loose, [when he] ain't

⁹¹ William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967) 9.

got no home or nuthin' to eat, 'cause dey tells us we's free."⁹² Watkins witnessed the tumult that plagued the South and remembered that "de first time [they saw] the Klu Klux [was] right after the war. Dey whips de slaves wat leaves the plantations, dey don' wan' dem to be free."⁹³

Watkins eventually enlisted in 1870 with the Twenty-fifth and fought the Apache and Cheyenne in Texas and Oklahoma. He suffered an injury during a skirmish with the Cheyenne in the Indian Territory where an arrow was shot through his wrist. For Watkins, the Civil War caused great upheaval. For the first time in his life, he was free to choose what he did next, however Watkins, like so many other former slaves, was baffled by his new place in society and unsure of how he fit into the new social hierarchy. While the Union forces, told him he was free and must work for a living, Watkins also faced elements of the old Southern society that still pressured him to remain in a state of servitude. Watkins largely escaped these dueling tensions, to some degree, by enlisting in the army.

William Branch, like Watkins, was born a slave and after the war enlisted with the Twenty-fifth infantry unit and later resettled in the West. Branch does not describe struggling with finding his place in society but rather more poignantly experienced some solace in the Army. Branch was one of seventy-five slaves owned by a man named Lawyer Woodsen who resided in Lunenburg County, Virginia. Describing his life as a slave, Branch "wukked tobacco sometime, sometime cotton," stating "dere wasn't no whippin' or switchin'" but "we had to wuk hard."⁹⁴ Branch ran away from his master when Union forces reached his county in a year. Years later he signed up with the Twenty-fifth in Baltimore as a free man. Life in the army was not easy. Branch marched, "it was up, up, de whole time," and slept outside; and his regiment fought

⁹² "Two Soldiers Recall Their Youth and Service in the 25th Infantry, 1870-1880," in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West*, ed. by Frank N. Schubert (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) 54.

⁹³ "Two Soldiers Recall Their Youth and Service," in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 54.

⁹⁴ "Two Old Soldiers Recall Their Youth and Service," in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 51.

the Cheyenne, which “‘twere like fightin’ a wasp’s nest.”⁹⁵ However, when asked if he liked the army life, Branch responded “yahsuh, I’d ruthuh be in den army den a plantation slave.”⁹⁶

Although not always a forward progression in the direction of equality, life seemed to be, albeit it very slowly, getting better in the post-war years for men like Watkins and Branch.

While newly emancipated slaves hoped for an unprecedented era of new freedoms, Indian nations such as the Sioux and Cheyenne were standing on the precipice of what would be the absolute destruction of their traditional culture. The slow erosion of their old way of life had started well before the Civil War, but their hopes of returning to any resemblance of their former life would be completely destroyed by 1890. There would be no turning back. Most of the Indians living on the Plains in 1865 were not native to those lands. In 1862, the Eastern Sioux had rose in rebellion, but the army put this uprising to rest. The Eastern Sioux were largely pushed out of their homeland of Minnesota and escaped into the Dakota territory.⁹⁷ This in turn, displaced other nations. The Sioux, although rife with factionalism, was a powerful nation that seized territory from the Iowa, Ponca, Pawnee, Arikara, Mandan, Hidatsa, Assiniboine, and Crow, enabling them to “emerge the monarchs of the northern Plains.”⁹⁸ Jerome Big Eagle of the Sioux nation echoed the sentiment of a resistance to change as he recalled the origins of the Eastern Sioux uprising in Minnesota of 1862. Although Big Eagle is critical of Indians unwilling to submit to white men, he still understands the reasoning behind the growing tensions. Big Eagle recalled that “the whites were always trying to make the Indians give up their life and live like white men – go to farming, work hard.”⁹⁹ Big Eagle stressed that while he may have agreed

⁹⁵ “Two Old Soldiers Recall Their Youth,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Solders*, 53.

⁹⁶ “Two Old Soldiers Recall Their Youth,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 53.

⁹⁷ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 78.

⁹⁸ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 9-10.

⁹⁹ Jerome Big Eagle, “A Sioux Story of War,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost*, ed. Colin G. Calloway (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 1996) 91-96.

that some aspects of the white man's life could be incorporated into their previous existence, "it seemed too sudden to make such a change."¹⁰⁰ The Indians wanted to live as they had before the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, signed in 1851. They wanted to return to how things were, where they could "go where they pleased and when they pleased; hunt game wherever they could find it, sell their furs to the traders, and live as they could."¹⁰¹ As dusk finally settled upon the fighting of the Civil War, many Indians were preparing themselves to fight for their traditional way of life, but as the army slowly turned its full attention westwards, this would become a feat impossible to accomplish.

The inhabitants of the Plains in the 1800's were no strangers to warfare. As the Sioux had been expelled from their native lands, they conquered as they moved west. Alliances were quickly formed, broken and reformed on the Plains. Fighting and warfare was often "fluid and continuous, as tribes struggled to conquer or protect hunting grounds."¹⁰² Traditional European style battle was rare. Fighting usually played out in the form of small-scale raids and counter-raids, with slow gains of territory in hopes of attaining better hunting grounds.¹⁰³ Pretty Shield, a woman of the Crow nation, described chaotic nature of constant warfare. Pretty Shield acknowledged that "there was always war," where if "[their] enemies were not bothering [*them*], [their] warriors were bothering [their enemies]."¹⁰⁴ She also points out the hardships of warfare that were felt among the entire tribe, not just the warriors who fought. There were many victims of the constant violence as "there was always some woman, sometimes many women, mourning for men who had been killed in war." Women like Pretty Shield greatly suffered because when

¹⁰⁰ Jerome Big Eagle, "A Sioux Story of War," 91.

¹⁰¹ Jerome Big Eagle, "A Sioux Story of War," 91.

¹⁰² Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 16-17.

¹⁰³ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Pretty Shield, "Like Talking to Winter-Winds," in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, ed. Colin G. Calloway (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 1996) 85

women “lost [their] men [they] lost [their] own, and [their] children’s living.”¹⁰⁵ While warfare was part of their way of life, many people suffered. This pattern of chaotic violence and suffering would only increase as warfare among nations continued through resistance to the white invasion into the 1870’s and 1880’s.

Warfare was not the most central force to Plains Indian life, that honor belonged to the buffalo herds that roamed over the extensive vistas of the Plains. The buffalo were essential to the culture of the Sioux and Cheyenne. Buffalo was the main source of sustenance and provided materials for items as essential as basic shelter in the form of tipis, food, clothing, and medicine. Every part of the animal was used. While buffalo had always played a significant role in the lives of natives living on the Plains, the introduction of the horse made “hunting infinitely easier,” while also increasing tribal clashes as warriors became more mobile in defending and conquering larger hunting grounds.¹⁰⁶ Buffalo were also paramount to the religion of Plains culture. The Sun Dance was one of the most important religious rituals in the life of the Cheyenne and Sioux. Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota man who grew up during this time of immense change, wrote an autobiography about his life. Standing Bear wrote that in the summer of 1879, he “saw the last great Sun Dance of the Sioux.”¹⁰⁷ Standing Bear described the hanging of an effigy of a buffalo and a man, which was meant as a prayer for more buffalo meat. Black Elk was a medicine man who lived during the same time as Standing Bear. He described a buffalo ceremony in which he represented a buffalo and thus “the people were all eager to serve [him], and in this [he] represented the relationship between the people and the buffalo, from the buffalo, people had

¹⁰⁵ Pretty Shield, “Like Talking to Winter-Winds,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 85.

¹⁰⁶ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux*, ed by E. A. Brininstool (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928) 113. Standing Bear went to the Carlisle Indian School in the fall of 1879 and writes that he could not actually be sure if this was the last Sun Dance ever performed or not.

reared their children up.”¹⁰⁸ By the late 1860’s the once great herds were already dying due to the over hunting, competition for land by horse herds and disease. Already in decline, the buffalo were nearly pushed to the brink of extinction with the construction of the railroads. Seen as only obstacles to modern progress, railroad companies hired hunters to eliminate the herds. Many made fortunes off the murder of the buffalo. As the railroad extended out across the West, the buffalo herds continued to disappear and with it the lifestyle of the Sioux and Cheyenne.

It did not take long for nations to fully realize the threat that the white man posed even if they did not recognize the point of no return until it had long since passed them by. In 1868, Iron Shell, a Brule Sioux spoke about the change the white man had brought upon his people. Iron Shell places blame on the white man saying “you have come into my country without my consent and spread you soldiers over it.”¹⁰⁹ He expressed remorse at the change that has stricken his land and simply states “we want you to set us all right and put us back the same as in old time.”¹¹⁰ With the coming of the railroad and the extermination of the buffalo herds, a return to old times was not remotely possible.

The acclaimed Oglala Sioux leader, Red Cloud, had a long and troubled past. And the white man’s influence had direct negative effects on his life from a very young age, as his father drank himself to death when Red Cloud was four years old.¹¹¹ With time and age, Red Cloud proved himself to be a very capable warrior and leader. Charles Eastman was a Santee Dakota physician who wrote many books from the Indian perspective and witnessed events such as the aftermath of the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. In one of his books, *Indian Heroes &*

¹⁰⁸ Black Elk, “The Buffalo Ceremony,” in *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk’s Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, ed by. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1984) 240-241.

¹⁰⁹ Iron Shell, “We Want You to Take Away Forts From the Country,” in *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 4th ed, Colin G. Calloway (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2012) 376.

¹¹⁰ Iron Shell, “We Want You to Take Away Forts From the Country,” 377.

¹¹¹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 32.

Great Chieftains, he writes about Red Cloud along with the nature of leadership in Indian social structures. Eastman states that “this distinction must be borne in mind – that while the early chiefs were spokes-men and leaders in the simplest sense, possessing no real authority, those who headed their tribes during the transition period were more or less rulers and more or less politicians,” Red Cloud being among the transition period leaders.¹¹² Eastman described the era in which Red Cloud gained renown as a time when the Sioux were “entering upon the most stormy period of their history. The old things were fast giving place to the new.”¹¹³ With the opening of the Bozeman Trail, conflict between the Sioux and federal government was on the rise with tensions increasing between Sioux leaders on how to best deal with the coming crisis. In 1865, the nations living in Powder River Country were “so sure of their country’s impregnability that most of them were skeptical when they began hearing rumors of soldiers coming;” however, soon forts were built in the area, a sure sign of an increased presence of whites.¹¹⁴ The question of whether to have a full-fledged insurrection against the building of the forts or to submit to the white forces, soon plagued the Sioux nation.

The factionalism that had long beset the Indian nations before the coming of the white man, made uniting in the face of calamity increasingly difficult. Speaking in 1866, Red Cloud made an impassioned speech against submission, starting by stating “it has been our misfortune to welcome the white man. We have been deceived.”¹¹⁵ Red Cloud asked his people if the “glittering trinkets of this rich man... shall tempt us to give up our homes, our hunting grounds, and the honorable teaching of our old men?”¹¹⁶ Red Cloud adamantly argued for the war

¹¹² Charles A. Eastman, *Indian Heroes & Great Chieftains* (Boston: Little, Brown, And Company, 1918) 3.

¹¹³ Eastman, *Indian Heroes & Great Chieftains*, 10.

¹¹⁴ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1970) 104.

¹¹⁵ Red Cloud, “Shall We Permit Ourselves to be Driven To and Fro?” in *Great Speeches by Native Americans*, ed. Bob Blaisdell (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000) 130.

¹¹⁶ Red Cloud, “Shall We Permit Ourselves to be Driven To and Fro?” 130.

asserting that the white soldiers “presence [in their territory] [was] an insult and a threat. It [was] an insult to the spirits of [their] ancestors.”¹¹⁷ However, Spotted Tail, another prominent Sioux leader of a Brule background, spoke out against fighting the coming tide of white men. He reminded his audience of the “many multitudes of the animal tribes we ourselves have destroyed! Just as the snow turns to water and green leaves eventually dry up, [the Sioux] are a part of this life and it seems that [their] time is come.”¹¹⁸ Spotted Tail argued that this was a war they could not win.

However, in July of 1866 Red Cloud attacked the Bozeman and “it became a ghost trail, devoid of white travelers.”¹¹⁹ The *Montana Post* published an article in October of 1866, written by a man who had attempted a prospecting trip to the Bighorn Mountains by way of the Bozeman. He described an incident where two of the men from his party “were so horribly murdered by the Indians.” These two men went off hunting one day and never returned. The next day that party found the two bodies which were “awfully cut up by arrows, four or five of which were still remaining in each... both had been scalped and laying on their backs.” The writer described the local fort, Fort Phil Kearny as “a disturbing post” that could barely defend itself as since its constructions the Indians had “stolen nearly all of its stock.” His party continued to be attacked for the rest of his venture and in the end “not a respectable color of gold was obtained.”¹²⁰ For all the violence and struggles this man encountered, he did not find what he set out for. Although not explicitly stated it seems unlikely that this man would not wish to return.

¹¹⁷ Red Cloud, “Dakotas, I am for War!” in *Great Speeches by Native Americans*, 131.

¹¹⁸ Spotted Tail, “This Strange White Man – Consider Him, His Gifts are Manifold” in *Great Speeches by Native Americans*, 134.

¹¹⁹ Cozzens *The Earth is Weeping*, 35.

¹²⁰ “A Bloody Prospecting Trip in the Bighorn Mountains,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War For the Northern Plains*, Vol. 4. Ed by. Peter Cozzens (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003) 58-63.

For a time it seemed as if Red Cloud had the capacity to fight off the impending current of white dominion.

Red Cloud had great success in his war. He raided, burned forts and attacked wagon trails. In the years after the Civil War, the army lacked the means to adequately occupy all the land that called for its services. During Red Cloud's war, Congress was more concerned with rebuilding and maintaining peace in the South, than the increasingly expensive fighting occurring in the Northern Plains. As the alliance of Sioux and Cheyenne continued to attack the Bozeman Trail with impunity, the government turned to the cheaper route of peace talks.¹²¹ Red Cloud refused to come to the bargaining table until the newly built forts in his territory were abandoned. Red Cloud was eventually asked to come to Fort Laramie in 1868 to sign a peace treaty. He came once troops began abandoning their forts in the Powder River country. Dee Brown, writing from the Indian perspective in 1970, wrote "after two years of resistance, Red Cloud had won his war."¹²² However Peter Cozzens, writing in 2016 offered the opinion that in the spring of 1868 new railway tracks had been placed in Utah which "permit[ed] safe travel to the Montana goldfields," thus circumventing the Bozeman Trail and leaving the forts in Powder River country defunct.¹²³ What is a fact is, Red Cloud signed the treaty. While it appeared that Red Cloud had succeeded in attaining his original goals, he had been deceived. He had accepted fixed boundaries to his territory and thus "effectively agreed to relinquish his freedom whenever the government saw fit."¹²⁴ Red Cloud may have won a short-term battle but the war was far from over.

¹²¹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 45.

¹²² Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970) 145.

¹²³ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 45.

¹²⁴ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 46.

In the South, a new war was heating up between the Southern Cheyenne and the Army. Spurred on by the success of their allies in the North, bands of Cheyenne began leaving their reservations. However, after the failures in the North, General Hancock, the leader of the army in the area along with General Sherman were eager to avenge the Fetterman massacre, the mentality being “if [Sherman] couldn’t beat Red Cloud, he could at least make Indians somewhere suffer.”¹²⁵ Hancock succeeded in aggravating almost the entirety of the Southern Cheyenne and their allies. This conflict would ultimately lead to the massacre of Black Kettle’s Cheyenne band at Washita. Initially met with little success, Sherman quickly grew frustrated and angered at the government’s willingness to discuss peace talks with the Cheyenne and Arapahoe. General Sherman wrote in a letter that he “wante[ed] [his commanding officers] to go ahead, kill and punish the hostile, rescue the captive white women and children, capture and destroy the ponies...they must clearly understand that they must never again hunt outside the limits of the Territory defined.”¹²⁶ Here, Sherman defends the actions of the officers and soldiers at Sand Creek and Washita, stating his belief that “the great mass of our people cannot be humbugged into the belief that Black Kettle’s camp was friendly” and Sherman affirms that “[he] is well satisfied with Custer’s attack and would not have wept if he could have served Satanta’s and Bull Bear’s bands in the same styles.”¹²⁷ Sherman was specifically referring to the Cheyenne, Arapahoe and Kiowa in the Indian Territory that would become Oklahoma. However, the sentiment was clear. Going forward there would be little diplomatic negotiations with the Indians. The time for peace talks was over, the military was determined to exact their dominance over the Indian nations through violence.

¹²⁵ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 65.

¹²⁶ William T. Sherman, “General William T. Sherman Approves Wiping out the Hostiles, 1868,” in *Major Problems in American Military History*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II and G. Kurt Piehler (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Co., 1999) 194-195.

¹²⁷ William T. Sherman, “General William T. Sherman Approves Wiping out the Hostiles, 1868,” 194-195.

Newly elected president, Ulysses S. Grant had conflicting opinions from the frontier army on how to achieve peace. At first, the army was pleased to have Grant become the new commander-in-chief, as in the past “he had defended Sherman and Sheridan’s hard-fisted approach to the Indian problem and decried civilian meddling.”¹²⁸ However, acting now as a civilian and not a general, Grant began to embrace the peace policy put forth by Quakers and social reformers, opting against Sherman’s steadfast belief that the Indian must be whipped into submission. Grant overhauled the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He gave Quaker men control over field operations, thereby replacing previous notoriously corrupt agents. He convinced Congress of the need for independent supervision of the bureau, and thus the Board of Indian Commissioners was established. And perhaps the most surprising act to modern day thinkers, was the appointment of Ely S. Parker, “a full-blooded Seneca Iroquois sachem from upstate New York.”¹²⁹ Parker had served on Grant’s staff during the war where he had proven his integrity and intellect. While Parker was known for his conviction “that the Indians’ future lay in acculturation” it was also assumed he would follow the reformers belief that the path forward should be as non-violent as possible.¹³⁰ Under Parker, the Bureau’s policy was to continue to move Indians on top reservations and teach them the ways of “civilization,” and avoid any bloodshed along the way. One of the most lasting effects of Grant’s Peace Policy was the end of the treaty system. The Indian Appropriations Act of 1871 deemed Indians as “wards of the government” and thus not a sovereign nation that the United States could sign treaties with.¹³¹ At the heart of the policy lay a sincere wish to end the warfare of the West.

¹²⁸ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 113.

¹²⁹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 113-15.

¹³⁰ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 114.

¹³¹ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 127-132.

However, this provided room for the military to create an influential role for themselves in the process. If Indians were now going to be living exclusively on reservations, any and all Indians off reservation could be assumed to be hostile in the eyes of men like General Sheridan. General Sherman opposed to the transfer of the Indian Bureau away from the War Department. Although Sherman supported the overall theory behind the Peace Policy, stating in a letter written in 1873, “I think no army officer objects” to the goals of the policy, he adamantly believed the army was the best vehicle for subduing the Indians and fulfilling the goals of Grant’s peace policy.¹³² Sherman wrote, in his naturally blunt manner, “the army has no ‘policy’ about Indians or anything else. It has no voice in Congress, but accepts the laws as enacted and the interpretation thereof by the proper officials, and executes them with as much intelligence, fidelity, and humanity as any other body of citizens.”¹³³ However, Sherman was of the opinion that the army does not have to proper authority to address reservations conflicts under the “peace policy” even though “[he] think[s] the army officers are better qualified to judge than the average citizen.”¹³⁴ Sherman even makes the assertion that “the army has a much more difficult task now than if we were actually at war.”¹³⁵ He finished by arguing that “all Indians must be made to know that when the government commands, they must obey, and until that state of mind is reached, through persuasion or fear, we cannot hope for peace.”¹³⁶ Sherman’s outlook on this policy offers a larger perspective on the disconnect between the hopes of the federal government in Washington D.C. and the harsh realities they met once put into action out west. What

¹³² William T. Sherman, “The Indian Question, April 17, 1873,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Indian and the Army*, ed. Peter Cozzens (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2005) 109-113.

¹³³ Sherman, “The Indian Question, April 17, 1873,” 109.

¹³⁴ Sherman, “The Indian Question, April 17, 1873,” 110.

¹³⁵ Sherman, “The Indian Question, April 17, 1873” 111.

¹³⁶ Sherman, “The Indian Question, April 17, 1873” 113.

sometimes seemed to be a plausible path on paper read by congressmen in their offices at the Capital, was not always achievable in the theater of the West.

What seemed to be lost in these arguments over who should have ultimate authority when creating Indian policy were the opinions of the Plains Indians themselves. In 1869, the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty that Red Cloud had signed a year before had not been carried into fruition. Red Cloud could either make war again, supported by “a thousand angry warriors” or he could choose a more diplomatic means of airing his grievances. While Red Cloud had previously won the rights to unceded Indian territory, with a scarcity of game and harsh winters, the lands were proving inhospitable in recent years.¹³⁷ The Oglala leader chose diplomacy and traveled to Washington D.C. to speak with President Grant. Around the same time Spotted Tail, an old adversary of Red Cloud, was also vocalizing his frustrations with the conditions on his own reservation. He too traveled to the nation’s capital. After hard negotiations, the government allowed Red Cloud and his people to stay in the area around Fort Laramie and Spotted Tail was permitted to relocate back to his homeland of northwest Nebraska.¹³⁸ While it appeared here that Grant’s Peace Policy had succeeded in convincing two Indian leaders to encourage their people to stay on a reservation, it has also had the effect of angering two men who previously held opposite opinions on how to best deal with the white man. From the beginning Spotted Tail was more malleable to the wishes of the government, while Red Cloud fought a war. One would assume it would be easier to please Spotted Tail but both voiced their anger at the capital. Thus, showing the peace policy’s ignorance of the needs of the different groups of Indians. The peace policy largely died with Grant’s presidency which ended in scandal and corruption. While the policy appeared successful in some cases such as turning Red Cloud away from the warpath in

¹³⁷ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 119.

¹³⁸ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 119-120.

1869, it largely failed to provide a lasting peace, which would be abundantly evident in the year of 1876.

The Civil War had changed society forever. The old social order had fallen with the demise of the Confederacy. Society does not last long without a new hierarchy taking the place of the old. Although initially thrown into disarray as emancipated slaves struggled to gain their civil rights, the old southern ways eventually prevailed as Jim Crow took root. It would take longer to form a new social structure on the Plains. At the close of the Civil War, the army needed to find a new place in society. Partially a cause, and partially an effect, new types of people joined the military as a result. While men like General Sherman and General Sheridan found their grasps on power diminishing, immigrants and black men found a way to gain some level of respect and honor, something which had never been afforded to them before, through their military experiences. While the United States was experiencing the dawn of a new age, the Sioux and the Cheyenne were looking upon the what looked to be dusk falling over their very existences. The onslaught of white settlements would cause irreversible changes that would prove to be impossible to combat. All three of these groups were standing in the face of immense change. For some, such as the Buffalo soldiers, this offered opportunities for progress, but many such as Black Kettle, Spotted Tail and Red Cloud were left behind in this new period. The end of an era is always followed by a new one. And the social hierarchy of the new one was far from established by 1873. Nearly two decades of chaos and violence would pass before a new structured order would emerge.

Chapter Two

War and All That Comes With It: Wars and Expeditions and the Ensuing Violence in the Plains, 1867-1890

The Indians are practically a doomed race, none realize it better than themselves. They have contended inch by inch for every foot of territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The strength, superior intelligence, and ingenuity of the white race in the construction of weapons of war, and their vast superiority in numbers, have not deterred the Indians from resisting the power of the whites.

General Nelson A. Miles

The band I was in got together and said they were not going to let the white men run over them and down deep in my heart I was going to defend my fellow men to the last. At the age of ten or eleven I had a six shooter and a quiver full of arrows to defend my nation.

Black Tail Deer

The rest have gone home, To meet the blizzard's wintry blast. The Ninth, the willing Ninth, Is camped here till the last. We were the first to come, Will be the last to leave Why are we compelled to stay, Why this reward receive? In warm barracks Our recent comrades take their ease, While we poor devils, And the Sioux are left to freeze.

Private W. H. Prather of I Troop, 9th Cavalry

The wars that were fought over the Plains in the late 19th century make up the longest span of war and violence that United States has ever experienced. Waged for over thirty years, the Plains Wars fought by the United States Army against the Sioux and the Cheyenne encompassed all aspects of life, and no one could escape its path. War meant more than skirmishes and battles. Marching could be a fatal affair for soldiers, with lives ending before encountering any Sioux or Cheyenne. While every culture copes with death and destruction differently, war can have the effect of spreading hardship and anguish among all whom it comes into contact. When fighting up and down the Great Plain's regions, the soldiers of the United States Army, both black and white and the warriors of the Sioux and Cheyenne nations, all struggled to win victories for their people and at other times, simply to survive to the next day.

While each group's fate was ultimately vastly different, all were exposed to similar sights, tribulations, and moments of extraordinary happiness and acute pain.

The geography of the plains affected the soldiers who crossed them. The terrain of the Plains “imposed the harshest conditions upon contending military forces and upon those who proposed to dwell there.”¹³⁹ Soldiers could not help but comment on both the great beauty and extreme inhospitality that the Plains presented. The Plains region itself has a variety of topographical differences. The Great Plains are defined in the *British Encyclopedia* as “a vast high plateau of semiarid grassland...some sections such as the Staked Plains are extremely flat; elsewhere, tree-covered mountains—the Black Hills... in general, this landscape is not the flat, featureless plain that most envision it to be.”¹⁴⁰ The climate of the Great Plains is a continental one, meaning “cold winters and warm summers, with low precipitation and humidity, much wind, and sudden changes in temperature.”¹⁴¹ The scenery of the Plains reflected both the hopes and the harsh realities of life on the Plains. The vastness and grandeur of the lands encompassed the hope of freedom and prosperity, while extreme climates reflected the obstacles in the way of such freedom and success.

While traveling to meet her husband who was serving as an officer in the army in the Dakota Territory in 1867, Sarah Elizabeth Canfield wrote in her diary that “this is a worse country than I ever dreamed of, nothing but shriveled grass in the hollows and on the river bottoms;” however, when Ms. Canfield left camp upon the departure of her husband, she described it as “a sad parting.”¹⁴² While the land initially disheartened her, Ms. Canfield was sad

¹³⁹ William Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963) 4-5.

¹⁴⁰ *Britannica*, s.v. “Great Plains, Region, North America.”

¹⁴¹ *Britannica*, s.v. “Great Plains, Region, North American.”

¹⁴² Sarah Elizabeth Canfield, “An Officer’s Wife in an Army Camp, April 13, 1867,” in *Distant Horizon: Documents from the Nineteenth-Century West*, ed. Gary Noy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 389.

to leave it. William H. Wood served in the Black Hills Expedition in 1874. He described seeing two rows of sunflowers, “as far as [they] could see, just an unbroken line of sunflowers... it was a pretty sight.”¹⁴³ Accompanying Wood on this expedition was the chief engineer of the Department of Dakota, William Ludlow, who also commented on the land in a letter to the Assistant Adjutant General of the Department of Dakota. He wrote that the country of the Black Hills was “an open prairie; wood scarce, and only found in river valleys.”¹⁴⁴

Ludlow also described the differences in the land they crossed, as after crossing the Belle Fourche on their Expedition, “the whole character of [their] surroundings was changed, there was an abundance of grass, timber, small fruits, and flowers and what was perhaps appreciated by all, an ample supply of pure cold water.”¹⁴⁵ Then on the way back towards where they came, Ludlow once again writes of a large change in the geography as they found themselves in a prairie and “the change to the hot dry air and yellow grass of the prairie was wonderfully sudden and anything but pleasant.”¹⁴⁶ Serving on the same march, Guy V. Henry wrote of the hardships that the geography caused such as freezing temperatures. Henry offers a vivid picture of the Badlands explaining, “it would be impossible to properly describe this region of desolate country.” He continues with his description;

Immense bald bluffs of chalky whiteness confront you. There is not a sign of vegetation, except as here and there a solitary pine tree stands its lonely watch, making by contrast the desolation more wretched. In summer, you are suffocated

¹⁴³ William H. Wood, “Reminiscences of the Black Hills Expedition,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, ed. Peter Cozzens (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2004) 176-178.

¹⁴⁴ William Ludlow, “The Black Hills Expedition, September 7, 1874” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, ed. Peter Cozzens (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2004) 173.

¹⁴⁵ Ludlow, “The Black Hills Expedition, September 7, 1874” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, 173.

¹⁴⁶ Ludlow, “The Black Hills Expedition, September 7, 1874” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, 174.

with cloud of alkali dust; in winter, or when the ground is wet, your wagons sink to their axles. Nature seems to forbid approach.¹⁴⁷

Henry even goes so far as to compare his surroundings to Dante's "Inferno".¹⁴⁸ While the landscape of the West could entice some, it also provided for an arduous journey for others.

Perhaps the main activity that came along with expeditions was marching. Soldiers marched much more than they fought. Sergeant Lauren Aldrich remembered the hardships involved with marching to new locations. Aldrich described his march from Omaha to Rawlins, Wyoming as being "forced [to] march from dawn to nearly dark every day over what seems an endless desert, in face of hot winds and blistering hot sun, suffering daily for the lack of water." Each man carried about thirty pounds and "even many of [their] mules succumbed to the hardships and die[d] on the way."¹⁴⁹ Many men contracted scurvy and scrofula, a type of tuberculosis, due to "exposure to rigid weather, lack of vegetables in [their] diet and other contributory agencies."¹⁵⁰ Aldrich, himself, was discharged from the army due to scrofula.

Lack of water was often the most threatening aspect of traversing through the Plains. The Staked Plains, located in the southwest of the region, was known for "its vast and almost waterless surface."¹⁵¹ While ranging through the Staked Plains the 10th Cavalry unit found themselves in a near fatal experience. Lieutenant Charles Cooper described the unit as lost "without water and no prospects of getting any, as [they] did not know which way to go for it, and from [their] experience [they] knew the greater part of the country was 'dry as a bone.'"¹⁵²

The situation soon became dire as the men became increasingly dehydrated, "their tongues and

¹⁴⁷ Guy V. Henry, "A Winter March to the Black Hills," in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, ed. Peter Cozzens (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2004) 183-187.

¹⁴⁸ Henry, "A Winter March to the Black Hills," in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, 183-187.

¹⁴⁹ Lauren W. Aldrich, "Guarding the Union Pacific," in *Indian War Veterans: Memories of Army Life and Campaigns in the West, 1864-1898*, ed. Jerome Greene (Havertown, US: Savas Beatie, 2007) 90-91.

¹⁵⁰ Aldrich, "Guarding the Union Pacific," in *Indian War Veterans*, 90-91.

¹⁵¹ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 4-5.

¹⁵² Charles Cooper, "Buffalo Soldiers in the Desert, 1877," in *Distant Horizon*, 406-407

throats were swollen, and they were unable to even swallow their saliva—in fact, they had no saliva to swallow.”¹⁵³ The soldiers resorted to drinking the blood of their fallen horses. The unit was saved when they finally came across a lake after three days, but not before four men had died from thirst.¹⁵⁴ This was not an occurrence unique to the Buffalo soldiers. Those on the Black Hills Expedition also experienced a concern over water resources. William Ludlow talked of these difficulties by stating “[water was] not always to be met with in sufficient quantity, and frequently impregnated with salts, making it both disagreeable and injurious.”¹⁵⁵ Access to the basic human need of drinkable water was often very limited and made traveling from place to place on the Plains an event fraught with more danger than simply engaging in skirmishes with Indians.

Water was not the only element that made marching extremely difficult. Snow, freezing temperatures, and gusting winds that brought blizzards plagued units on their long marches across the Plains.¹⁵⁶ Guy V. Henry described nearly freezing to death while exploring the Black Hills in 1875. Men had to be strapped to their saddles to force them to continue on “for if they were left behind, death would follow.”¹⁵⁷ When Henry finally made it back to their original departure location, he could barely recognize himself, due to his “black and swollen face. All of [his] fingers were frozen to their second joints; flesh sloughed off, exposing the bones,” one of which had to be amputated.¹⁵⁸ When units camped, they often “were compelled to undergo a general ‘shoveling-out’ next morning,” and marching in snow was an order that “was obeyed

¹⁵³ Charles Cooper, “Buffalo Soldiers in the Desert, 1877,” in *Distant Horizon*, 406-407

¹⁵⁴ Charles Cooper, “Buffalo Soldiers in the Desert, 1877,” in *Distant Horizon*, 406-407.

¹⁵⁵ William Ludlow, “The Black Hills Expedition, September 7, 1874” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, 173.

¹⁵⁶ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 4-5.

¹⁵⁷ Henry, “A Winter March to the Black Hills,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, 183-187.

¹⁵⁸ Henry, “A Winter March to the Black Hills,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern Plains*, 183-187.

with that peculiar vim which characterizes the undertaking of unpleasant necessities rather than the accomplishment of coveted duties,” so remarked Robert E. Strahorn, writing about the Powder River Expedition in 1876 for the *Rocky Mountain News*.¹⁵⁹ The elements provided for their own set of challenges outside of the threat of a raid by enemy Indians.

The frontier of the Plains spanned thousands of miles and General Sherman lacked the adequate amount of troops to defend the western military posts and settlements. Assigned to the southern section of the plains, the 10th Cavalry was split into three companies that served in the Indian Territory, while the other nine went off to Texas based posts. The 10th received their first taste of fighting in the summer of 1867. Captain George Armes described a skirmish with the Cheyenne, in which he was wounded in the hip and another man died when he was shot in the head. Armes and his company were surrounded by “at least 350 to 400 Indians, of whom six were killed and several were wounded while making dashes through the command.”¹⁶⁰ The band of Cheyenne continuously shot at the unit although “with very little effect,” which Armes assumed was because “they had not become accustomed to the use of [their] new firearms.”¹⁶¹

Armes thought,

“it [was] with greatest wonder in the world that [his] command and [himself] escaped being massacred, as [they] had to retreat fifteen miles through a hilly country, full of canons, rock and gullies, fighting [their] way foot by foot, the Indians dodging from one gully and rock to others and firing on [them] at every chance.”¹⁶²

This encounter speaks to the chaotic nature of fighting in the west, where there is no clear beginning or end to an engagement.

¹⁵⁹ Robert E. Strahorn, “‘Alter Ego’ on the Powder River Expedition,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War For the Northern Plains*, 204.

¹⁶⁰ Captain George A. Armes, “The 10th Cavalry in the Summer of 1867: First Battles and First Casualty,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers: Records, reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West*, ed. Frank N. Schubert (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) 12-15.

¹⁶¹ Armes, “The 10th Cavalry in the Summer of 1867,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 12-15

¹⁶² Armes, “The 10th Cavalry in the Summer of 1867,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 13-14.

However, with the endorsement of the Medicine Lodge Treaty in the fall of 1867, both the Cheyenne, allied nations and the US government hoped that a lasting peace had been achieved. The treaty provided for reservations for participating Indian nations in return for surrendering their claims to a larger swatch of land. The government promised to provide needed goods, and the Cheyenne “agreed to keep the peace, to stay away from the great roads, and not to molest the whites in any manner.”¹⁶³ In spite of this, there were continuing war parties ranging over the territories by those who had refused to be a part of the peace conference. General Sheridan and Sherman soon devised a plan to carry out a campaign in the winter months to drive the noncompliant Indians onto the reservations established at Medicine Lodge. They choose to “pursue and kill those who refused to go.”¹⁶⁴

In the north, the perquisites for some of the most famous fights in the history of the American West were being set. In the years between 1868 and 1873, the attempted implementation of President Grant’s peace policy caused confusion in military policy on the Northern plains. Grant’s peace policy “discouraged offensive campaigns, relying on good works rather than military conquest to bring peace.”¹⁶⁵ The military duties on the Northern Plains became increasingly wrapped up with construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad. The Sioux, seeing the railroads and the additional white men that came with it, harassed railway agents and their military escorts throughout 1873.¹⁶⁶ George Custer led the Yellowstone Expedition as a form of military protection for the construction of the railroad. Custer gained favor with the public again for his small victories in skirmishes with the Lakota after his fall from grace with the Washita Massacre. However, scholars such as Peter Cozzens argue that this expedition

¹⁶³ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 60-62.

¹⁶⁴ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 88.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 145.

¹⁶⁶ Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 160.

largely helped to put the Northern Pacific Railway into bankruptcy as investors were increasingly alarmed by the Sioux's raids.¹⁶⁷ Custer would later lead an expedition into the Black Hills to investigate claims of gold to be found.

The fight over the Black Hills is one that even extends into today. Two of the most legendary of all American Indian leaders, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse of the Sioux nation, were beginning to amass large followings. Sitting Bull was a Lakota who became cemented into American history as more myth than man. Charles Eastman writes that "Sitting Bull's history has been written many times by newspapermen and army officers, but I find no account of him which is entirely correct."¹⁶⁸ For many Sitting Bull was, "the war leader and holy man [who] personified the four Lakota cardinal virtues of bravery, fortitude, generosity and wisdom."¹⁶⁹ Charles Eastman describes Crazy Horse as "a true type of Indian refinement and grace," a warrior, but "a gentle warrior, a true brave, who stood for the highest ideal of the Sioux."¹⁷⁰ Crazy Horse "was noticeably reserved and modest" but yet, a natural leader.¹⁷¹ Peter Cozzens comes to the conclusion that he "was an outstanding warrior; perhaps the ablest of his generation on the northern plains."¹⁷² Crazy Horse will always remain a famous enigma as he never allowed his picture to be taken due to his mistrust of the camera. Unlike Red Cloud, who agreed to the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868 and used diplomatic means to solve his frustrations with the agreement, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse were unwilling to concede any power or land to the white men. This eventually led to the rejection of Red Cloud's leadership by young warriors in favor of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, "neither of whom had ever lived on a

¹⁶⁷ Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016) 202-207.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Eastman, *Indian Heroes and Chieftains* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1918) 112

¹⁶⁹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 192.

¹⁷⁰ Eastman, *Indian Heroes and Chieftains*, 83.

¹⁷¹ Eastman, *Indian Heroes and Chieftains*, 90.

¹⁷² Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 194-195.

reservation or taken the white man's handouts."¹⁷³ These two men would go on to play starring roles in some of the most famous battles in the folklore of the American West.

Custer returned from his Expedition to the Black Hills in 1874, claiming to have found the gold about which rumors had been spun. The trail that Custer took would later be named "Thieves' Road" by the Sioux.¹⁷⁴ The Sioux resented the trespasses by the settlers, which disrupted the buffalo herds and encroached on Sioux territory providing for more violent confrontations between whites and Sioux braves. And in the year that followed, hundreds of miners had spilled into the area in hopes of striking it rich.¹⁷⁵ Simply put, the army was neither prepared for nor equipped to prevent the prospectors from violating the Fort Laramie treaty of 1868 and invading the Sioux territory.¹⁷⁶ The government was unable to persuade the Sioux to sell land, as the territory held cultural significance and "among the best hunting grounds still available to the Sioux."¹⁷⁷ While General Alfred Terry, commander of the Department of Dakota sympathized with the Sioux, General Crook made little effort to enforce treaty boundaries and keep the miners off the land, even when issuing a direct edict, which ordered them to clear out of the land.¹⁷⁸ With the refusal to sell the land, and an army backed by the federal government unwilling to enforce the terms of the Fort Laramie treaty, war loomed over the horizon. Once again the chaotic nature of the Great Plains governed the future. The army's inability to control the miners that invaded the Black Hills created an environment in which uncertainty reigned. This left it unclear as to who ruled over the land, and violence tends to be the way in which this

¹⁷³ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970) 278.

¹⁷⁴ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 212.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 278.

¹⁷⁶ Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 161-162.

¹⁷⁷ Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 162.

¹⁷⁸ Brown, *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*, 278-279.

type of doubt is cleared up. The war that came brought with it the most famous and monumental defeats of both the United States Army and the Sioux nation.

Fighting on the Plains brought with it its own unique set of experiences. The warfare that the Sioux and the Cheyenne engaged in was very different than what the army was initially trained for. The battlefields out West looked very different from the ones of the Civil War. Indian war parties “ranged in size from half a dozen warriors to one hundred or more,” and they were “composed entirely of volunteers.”¹⁷⁹ Before the era of endless white invasion, warfare on the Plains mainly consisted of raids for “the sole purpose of stealing horses” and fighting for the expansion of hunting grounds.¹⁸⁰ When attacking soldiers, warriors “preferred to lay traps and bait the enemy with decoy warriors.”¹⁸¹ This tactic is described in many reports, journals and reminiscences of soldiers. While fighting with General Crook in the 1876 campaign against the Sioux and their Cheyenne allies, Charles King described a fight in which a Cheyenne war party employed this maneuver. When writing about his encounters with the Indians, King describes them as a hunter would describe a formidable prey. When his unit saw the decoy group of warriors, King writes, “savage warfare was never beautiful than in you... on you come, savage, hungry eyed, merciless.”¹⁸² King clearly knows about the hidden warriors as he states “two miles behind you are your scores of friends, eagerly, applaudingly watching your exploit.” King and his unit wait until the group of warriors are close enough, and then King attacks and the soldiers see “swarming down the ridge as far as [they] can see, come dozens of Indian warriors at top speed to the rescue.”¹⁸³ King and the men he served with prevail in this moment and chase the

¹⁷⁹ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 8-9.

¹⁸⁰ Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 8-9.

¹⁸¹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 52.

¹⁸² Charles King, *Campaigning With Crook and Stories of Army Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, 1890) 37-39.

¹⁸³ King, *Campaigning with Crook*, 38-39.

group back “under the sheltering wing of the Indian Bureau.”¹⁸⁴ This tactic was successful during Red Clouds War, in what latter became known as the Fetterman Massacre, where a unit led by Captain William Fetterman was successfully lured out of Fort Phil Kearny and eighty-one men were killed.¹⁸⁵ By 1876, the tactic was much less effective as the army learned to expect its use, although it was still admired by men such as King.

By 1875, it was clear that tensions between the Sioux, their Cheyenne allies and the white population was going to boil over into war. Speaking in 1875, Sitting Bull called to his people that spring had arrived and with it the time for action. He compared the white settlers to a “spring freshet; it overruns its banks and destroys all who are in its path.”¹⁸⁶ Sitting Bull did not believe it possible to coexist with them. He pointed to the Fort Laramie treaty signed in 1868, “which assured that the buffalo country should be left to [the Sioux] forever;” however, “now they threaten to take that from [the Sioux].” Sitting Bull asked his people a powerful question, “shall we submit? Or shall we say to them: ‘First kill me, before you can take possession of my fatherland!’”¹⁸⁷ By the winter of 1875, the war department had authorized General Sheridan to begin to bring hostile bands to the reservations by force including those led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse.¹⁸⁸ However, it was not General Sheridan, but rather George Custer who would engage in the most famous battle of the war.

The fight in which George Custer and his 7th Cavalry were wiped out but by a combined force of Sioux and Cheyenne is known to white culture as the Battle of Little Big Horn, and to the Indians as the Battle of the Greasy Grass. Over the years the battle has taken on different

¹⁸⁴ King, *Campaigning with Crook*, 38-39.

¹⁸⁵ Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier: 1846-1890*, Rev Ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) 105-106.

¹⁸⁶ Sitting Bull, “Behold, My Friends, The Spring is Come.” in *Great Speeches by Native Americans* ed. Bob Blaisdell (Mineola NY: Dover Publications, 2000) 166.

¹⁸⁷ Sitting Bull, “Behold, My Friends, The Spring is Come.” in *Great Speeches by Native Americans*, 166.

¹⁸⁸ Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 285.

meanings, interpretations and connotations. It is impossible to understand the experience of the 7th Cavalry as none survived the battle, however there are records of what the Indians saw, felt and experienced during and after this encounter, as well as the sentiment of the army and US government in the aftermath of Custer's defeat. There are also accounts from soldiers who were nearby at the time of the battle that help to illuminate the events of that day.

On June 25, 1876, Crazy Horse and his men were coming off of what could be considered a victory against General Crook at a fight at Rosebud almost a month before. In the days before Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull had dreamed of a great victory for his people, with soldiers falling into their camp upside down. Sitting Bull did not partake in the fighting as he was weak from the night before in which he had performed the Sun Dance Ritual which requires self-mutilation.¹⁸⁹ A Cheyenne warrior named Wooden Leg, remembered the initial shock and surprise of the oncoming cavalry's attack. He struggled to get ready and remembered that "women were hurriedly making up little packs for flight" and "children were hunting for their mothers."¹⁹⁰ He described the scene as "the air [being] so full of dust [he] could not see where to go... many hundreds of Indians on horseback were dashing to and fro in front of a body of soldiers."¹⁹¹ When the cavalry retreated the Cheyenne and Sioux pursued and soldiers "fell dead either from arrows, or from stabbings or jabbings or from blows by the stone war clubs of the Sioux. Horses limped or staggered or sprawled out dead or dying."¹⁹² Iron Hawk, a young Sioux boy of only fourteen years described killing a soldier when he shot an arrow that went "through from side to side under his ribs and it stuck out on both sides."¹⁹³ When the soldier fell from his saddle and did not immediately die, Iron

¹⁸⁹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 233.

¹⁹⁰ Wooden Leg, "A Cheyenne Account of the Battle," in *Our Hearts Fell To The Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost*. Ed. Colin G. Calloway (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's, 1996) 137-140.

¹⁹¹ Wooden Leg, "A Cheyenne Account of the Battle," in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 138.

¹⁹² Wooden Leg, "A Cheyenne Account of the Battle," in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 140.

¹⁹³ Iron Hawk, "Killing Custer's Men," in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 144-145.

Hawk dismounted and “beat him to death with [his] bow.”¹⁹⁴ Luther Standing Bear wrote what his father had told him about the “Killing of Long Hair,” the Sioux name for General Custer. Chief Standing Bear appears to give a rather sympathetic take on the battle as he reported, “when we rode into these soldiers I really felt sorry for them, they looked so frightened. They did not shoot at us. They seemed so panic-stricken that they shot up into the air. Many of them lay on the ground, with their blue eyes open, waiting to be killed.”¹⁹⁵ Luther Standing Bear continues on to state that was all his father would tell him of the Battle of Greasy Grass, “[Luther] never heard this battle spoken of in a bragging way.”¹⁹⁶

There are some aspects of the battle from the white soldier’s perspective that may be surmised from tales of other military engagements that have common themes. One of these being the wish to die before an Indian warrior had the chance to kill you. When faced with the possibility of imminent death when meeting what would appear to be an overwhelming enemy force, many men would rig a gun to their foot to shoot themselves. This is described in an encounter with the Sioux during Red Cloud’s War that became known as the Wagon Box fight. A soldier described seeing his fellow men “take the shoe-strings from his shoes, tie them together, and fit one loop over his right foot and the other to the trigger of his rifle.”¹⁹⁷ This maneuver was in this soldiers words, to ensure “the red devils never would get him alive,... to kill themselves when all hope was lost, ... every man would stand erect, place the muzzle of his loaded rifle under his chin, and take his own life, rather than be captured and held for inevitable

¹⁹⁴ Iron Hawk, “Killing Custer’s Men,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 144-145.

¹⁹⁵ Chief Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux*. Ed. E. A. Brininstool (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928) 83.

¹⁹⁶ Chief Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux*, 83.

¹⁹⁷ E.A. Brininstool and Samuel S. Gibson, “The Wagon Box Fight,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War For the Northern Plains*, 97.

torture.”¹⁹⁸ While the men of the 7th Cavalry may not have had time to rig such contraptions, it would not be unreasonable to assume that if this was a popular action described in many fights, then the sentiment behind it would have been felt by the soldiers at Little Big Horn. Charles King writes that a Brule warrior told the army that during the battle of Little Big Horn, a soldier was able to break from the fighting and gallop away. When he saw that he was being pursued, he “fancied himself nearly overtaken, and plac[ed] the muzzle of his revolver at his ear, pulled the trigger and sent his own bullet through his brain.”¹⁹⁹ Both the animosity and fear towards the “red devils” would have been present in most soldier’s minds.

What has been unquestionably captured in the annals of the American West is the fallout of Custer’s defeat among the army. Charles King writes that the only living thing that survived that day was an officer’s horse, which “came straggling into the lines some days after the fight, ... bleeding from many wounds, weak and exhausted.” So deep was the grief of the army and what little remained of the 7th Cavalry that they “guard[ed] and cherish[ed] [the horse], no more duty [did] he perform; no rider ever mount[ed] him.”²⁰⁰ King then writes that Indians realized that this big victory only ensured that “the commands of Crook and Terry would be heavily reinforced, and then the hunt would be relentless.”²⁰¹ While the army both grieved for the 7th and attempted to place the blame for the military debacle solely on Custer’s shoulders, Congress became reinterested in the cause for the war in the first place. Congress ordered the Secretary of War to “report to the House [of Representatives] the object of the military expeditions under

¹⁹⁸ E.A. Brininstool and Samuel S. Gibson, “The Wagon Box Fight,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War For the Northern Plains*, 97.

¹⁹⁹ Charles King, “Custer’s Last Battle,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War For the Northern Plains*, 296.

²⁰⁰ King, “Custer’s Last Battle,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War For the Northern Plains*, 296.

²⁰¹ King, “Custer’s Last Battle,” in *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War For the Northern Plains*, 296.

Generals Crook, Gibbon, and Terry... the circumstances leading to their necessity.”²⁰² The report ultimately allowed for an increase of soldiers serving out west and once again gave control over the Indian agencies to the military.²⁰³ Newspapers at the time also helped to reinforce the perceived need for more men to join the fight. When reporting on Little Big Horn, both the *Norwich Courier*, from Connecticut and the *Plain Dealer* from Ohio wrote “the Seventh fought like tigers and were overcome by mere brute force.”²⁰⁴ Meanwhile the alliance between the Sioux and Cheyenne which had allowed for their victory at Greasy Grass, soon dissolved and with it, all significant and organized military resistance to white control over the Black Hills.

While the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne were beginning to wage war in the North, the Southern Cheyenne were becoming increasingly agitated in the Southern Plains. Settlers were harassing Indian bands and stealing horses. This was brought to a boiling point over the death of the buffalo herds. The Cheyenne and other local nations felt that if the buffalo hunters were not beaten, then they were going to be forced to starve.²⁰⁵ Although describing a hunt that occurred in Wyoming and not in the southern Plains, “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s account of a buffalo hunt speaks to the radical difference in perspective on the buffalo between the white hunters and the Plains nations. In his autobiography, Cody describes a “celebrated buffalo hunt” with a friend, in which the terms were as follows; “[they] were to hunt one day of eight hours, beginning at eight o’clock in the morning, and closing at four o’clock in the afternoon. The wager was five hundred dollars a side, and the man who should kill the greater number of buffaloes from on horseback

²⁰² U.S. Congress, House, House Committee on Military Affairs, *Military Expedition Against the Sioux Indians*, July 18, 1876, 1.

²⁰³ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 271.

²⁰⁴ This same sentence appeared in both: “The Indian War, Another Butchery, General Custer Killed, Sixteen Officers Murdered, Not a Man Alive of Five Companies,” *Norwich Courier*, July 5, 1876. And “Lo! The Poor Indian, Defeat and Death of Gen. Custer, Three Hundred Soldiers Killed,” *Plain Dealer*, July 6, 1876.

²⁰⁵ William Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967) 114.

was to be declared the winner.”²⁰⁶ Even referees were in attendance to keep track of the kills. For the Cheyenne and others like them, buffalo was their main source of food and materials, here, Cody is attempting to kill as many of the animal as possible just to see how many he can in the span of eight hours.

Cody’s hunt was “pretty well advertised and noised abroad,” and became a spectacle as “a large crowd witnessed the interesting and exciting scene... an excursion party, mostly from St. Louis, consisting of about a hundred gentlemen and ladies, came out on a special train to view the sport.”²⁰⁷ After Cody and his friend made their runs at different herds, they quenched their thirst with bottles of champagne. By the end of the allotted eight hours, Cody had killed sixty-nine buffalo and his companion had killed forty-six.²⁰⁸ Cody stated that the group “took with [them] some the choice meat and the finest heads,” and at the time he was hunting for the Kansas Pacific Railroad which “found a very good use for them... mount[ing the heads] in the best possible manner” and sent them across the country to be displayed “at the leading hotels, depots, and other public building, as a sort of trade mark, or advertisement” for the company.²⁰⁹ What is perhaps one of the more fascinating aspects of this account is the affection and pride that Cody shows to his buffalo hunting horse. At the close of this hunt, Cody planned on returning to scouting for the army and did “not wish to kill” his horse, Brigham, by riding him while scouting, Cody sold the horse, “consol[ing himself] with the thought that [the horse] would not be likely to receive harder usage in other hands than he had in” Cody’s.²¹⁰ Cody goes on in his autobiography about the exploits of his beloved horse with its new owners and after several years

²⁰⁶ William F. Cody, *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody, Known as Buffalo Bill*. Ed. Frank Christianson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011) 197.

²⁰⁷ Cody, *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody*, 197.

²⁰⁸ Cody, *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody*, 199-200.

²⁰⁹ Cody, *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody*, 201.

²¹⁰ Cody, *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody*, 201.

apart Cody “put his arms around [the horse’s] neck, as though he had been a long-lost child,” when they were reunited.²¹¹ The contrast between Cody’s love for his horse and the complete lack of regard for the life of the buffalo is striking. To the Cheyenne and Sioux, the buffalo was the main sustenance of life and provided the spiritual and cultural basis of their lives. However, with hunting games like the one Buffalo Bill engaged in, was aiding in the extinction of the great animal. The buffalo were the very backbone of their culture, thereby making the buffalo crisis one over the very nature of their existence.

When the Red River War broke out in 1874, the Ninth Cavalry was called to serve. There is not the same wealth of writings by the buffalo soldiers as there are of white cavalry and infantry men. However, there are some and there are reports written by commanding officers. Sergeant Emanuel Stance was an original member of the Ninth Cavalry. He went on to win the Medal of Honor in 1870 for his valent conduct in this engagement. Stance had two skirmishes with Indians who were attempting to steal a small herd of horses. Stance was able to protect the herd “and after a few volleys [the Indians] left [him] to continue [his] march in peace.”²¹² The Captain of the Ninth wrote to the Adjutant General in Washington D.C. in order to “commend him to a higher authority” for “the gallantry displayed by the Sergeant and his party as well as good judgment used on both occasions.”²¹³ The buffalo soldiers also experienced hardships like those fighting on the Northern Plains. Reuben Waller, who served in the Tenth Cavalry and was present when the cavalry arrived to assist at the Battle of Beecher Island in 1878, wrote about the horrors he witnessed in the aftermath of this battle against the Northern Cheyenne. When Waller and the rest of the Tenth rescued the stranded men, they saw “thirty wounded and dead men right

²¹¹ Cody, *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody*, 203.

²¹² Reuben Waller, “The Battle at Beecher Island, September 1878,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 24-25.

²¹³ Frank N. Schubert, ed., *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) 36-38.

in the middle of fifty dead horses, that had lain in the hot sun for ten days. And these men had eaten the putrid flesh of those dead horses for eight days. The men were in a dying condition” when Waller began to rescue them.²¹⁴ While the geography on the Plains could differ vastly, causing physical differences in battles, those fighting in the northern or southern plains, black, white, or Indian, all faced extreme sacrifices and harsh conditions when fighting

Acts of extreme violence colored the lives of all who fought on the Plains. While scalping is the most famous violent act on the Plains, it is less well known that both Indians and soldiers participated in scalping. Both sides of every war commit atrocities. The massacres at Sand Creek, Washita and Wounded Knee are some of the most famous. Samuel H. Bently was a soldier whom served in the early 1870s against the Sioux. He remembered that on “one of [his] campaigns [Bently] saw a cottonwood stump, seven feet in height, where the Indians had tied a soldier and burnt him up. [Bently] saw his head, and picked up some buttons that came off of his blouse, showing that he was a soldier.”²¹⁵ Part of this speaks to the differences in the very way that Indians and the Army fought. Warfare among the Sioux, Cheyenne and their Allies and enemies was close combat. Part of what won a warrior’s honor in battle was the willingness to “court danger and tempt death, to risk self to an extent beyond reason.”²¹⁶ Counting Coup, which meant touching an enemy with a long and ornate rod called a coup stick” ranked among the greatest merits achieved in battle. If lacking a coup stick most any object would suffice, “the less lethal the object, the greater the honor.”²¹⁷ Scalping, although seemingly excessively violent to

²¹⁴ Reuben Waller, “The Battle at Beecher Island, September 1878,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 24-25.

²¹⁵ Samuel H. Bently, “A Reality of Warfare,” in *Indian War Veterans*, 92.

²¹⁶ Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux; Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964) 76.

²¹⁷ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 48-49.

white culture, was another important aspect of war in plains society.²¹⁸ When a warrior took a scalp it “was a badge of honor, a sign of victory, and a symbol of life itself all in one.”²¹⁹ The traditions and honor that came with counting Coup and scalping make close, face to face, warfare an inescapable reality of Plains warfare among the Indian nations. This is highly different from the type of fighting preferred by the army in which the gun made fighting from a distance possible and removed the killer from the personal interaction of seeing their enemy’s face up close.²²⁰ This slight distance between a soldier and the Indian he killed may have encouraged the culture of looking down upon the Indians as less than men and rather more as Charles King described, a formidable animal to be hunted.²²¹

When troops raided and destroyed a Cheyenne leader Dull Knife’s village in 1874 they found a “bag containing the right hands of 12 Shoshoni babies and children, ... and two scalps of 10 year-old girls, one white and one Shoshoni.”²²² This occurrence highlights an interesting aspect of “Indian” culture and race. Here, there is clearly no concept of “indianess” or a central native race that was separate from white among different nations. The Shoshoni were enemies of the Cheyenne and treated as such, much as the Sioux conducted military-like campaigns against the whites and the Crow. The Sioux had “a kind of faith in their own national destiny,” in which they were “convinced of their own superiority,” and “truly experienced a faith in their way of life,” no doubt encouraged and developed from their success in conquering the Plains as they

²¹⁸ It is important to note that different scholars have different views on the meaning of scalping. Some such as Hassrick discuss scalping as part of a vengeance motivated action, (although Hassick also makes a point to state that is only one of the many reasons that a warrior would take a scalp) while others such as Cozzens write that the Indians believed that scalping an enemy helped to protect the warrior from his victim’s soul in the afterlife. However, most agree that scalping meant more than simple excessive violence in Plains Culture as many believe that scalps and hair represented one’s spirit in Plains culture. Taking scalps was an important act that brought honor and prestige to a warrior in his society.

²¹⁹ Hassrick, *The Sioux*, 84.

²²⁰ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 55-56.

²²¹ In reference back to: King, *Campaigning with Crook*, 38-39

²²² William M. Osborn, *The Wild Frontier: Atrocities During the American-Indian War From Jamestown Colony to Wounded Knee* (New York: Random House, 2000) 229.

were pushed farther from their ancestral Eastern woodland home.²²³ However, the Cheyenne, Sioux, and the rest of the Plains Nations did see themselves as separate from blacks, often jeering and yelling racial epithets when facing buffalo soldiers in combat.²²⁴ However, when it came to fighting, Indians scalped the buffalo soldiers the same as the whites.²²⁵ In reality, race dominated all aspects of life as many whites looked down upon Indians, as if they were closer to animals rather than people. While not all acts of depravity can be boiled down only to race, race often played a role.

The Plains Wars came to a resounding end with the events at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1890. Fever over the Ghost Dance was reaching its pitch. The Sioux, Cheyenne and other native nations were performing the religious ritual much to the horror of the neighboring white population. The Ghost Dance was a religious ritual performed by the Sioux that deeply frightened the white population. The dance promised protection from the whites to those who performed it, and it was done in honor of the messiah who would come the following year and “bring unto them an earthly paradise free from whites.”²²⁶ In November, Lakota policemen had attempted to arrest Sitting Bull in connection to the Ghost Dancers. However, fighting broke out when a mob gathered outside his cabin, and when the gun smoke cleared, Sitting Bull was dead, shot by one of the Lakota policemen. Amid rising fear, the Lakota at the Pine Ridge agency were ordered to give up their arms in December of 1890. The army gathered a group of Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek. When soldiers attempted to disarm a deaf man, the gun went off and fighting broke out. The army shot cannons into the camp. In the end over 250 Lakota men,

²²³ Hassrick, *The Sioux*, 69.

²²⁴ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 60-61.

²²⁵ “Indian Affairs. Report from the Department. Transactions in the Far West. letters from Army Officers,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 2, 1867. Reported that a Kiowa war party returned to Fort Dodge with “the scalps of seventeen colored soldiers and one white man.” And thus, giving no indication that the southern plains nations regarded the scalps of the buffalo soldiers as worth less than those of white soldiers.

²²⁶ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 427.

women and children died.²²⁷ Charles Eastman cared for the wounded in the aftermath. When looking across the field of frozen dead in an attempt to search for survivors, “it took all of [Eastman’s] nerve to keep [his] composure in the face of this spectacle, and of the excitement and grief of [his] Indian companions, nearly every one of whom was crying aloud or singing his death song.”²²⁸

Black Elk, an Oglala holy man remarked on all that had been lost at Wounded Knee. A young man at the time, Black Elk did not grasp the enormity of the loss experienced at Wounded Knee until much later. In his old age, he could “still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young.” Black Elk remarked in his remembrance “I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people’s dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.”²²⁹ Wounded Knee marked the true end of an era. With iconic leaders such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull dead, and a loss of faith as the Ghost Dance had failed to provide the deliverance it had promised, the old traditional way of life was dead and buried, never to be attained again. The Sioux, Cheyenne and other nations were left to cross the threshold into a Brave New World that was neither designed for nor was welcoming to them.

Violence on the Plains was widespread and engulfed all walks of life between 1868 and 1890. War provided opportunities for both grand victories and devastating defeats. While white soldiers, Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, and the black military units may have fought with different techniques across a geographically diverse region, all experienced those victories and defeats; and none were immune from the utmost hardships that any person could endure. This era

²²⁷ “Ghost Dance,” *The West*, DVD, directed by Ken Burns (1996).

²²⁸ Charles Eastman, *From Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapter in the Autobiography of an Indian* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1916) 112.

²²⁹ Black Elk, “Massacre at Wounded Knee, 1890,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 201.

marked a time when black men could to a certain degree, assert their independence and manhood through their success in the army. The roughly thirty years after the Civil War was a period where black men took advantage of presented opportunities to carve out new lives of freedom to whatever extent that this could be achieved. In this very same time span, the Sioux and Cheyenne experienced the exact opposite, with their freedoms being forcibly taken from them until all that was left lay on the frozen ground at Wounded Knee. All of this was both inadvertently and purposefully facilitated by white civilization. The repurposing of the US army and new sense of liberty, so desperately craved by the East in the years after the Civil War was achieved in the West, but at an immense and often overlooked cost to an entire civilization. While this victory over taming the West is very much celebrated in white American myth, legend, and culture, the extraordinary violence that it took to achieve it is largely ignored.

Chapter Three

When An Obligation Becomes A Burden And When A Burden Becomes too Cumbersome to Bear: The Successes and Failures of the Obligations of those in Power to those in Need.

A warrior I have been. Now it is all over. A hard time I have.
Sitting Bull, 1881

My grandfather would tell me that when Sitting Bull was killed, they had very few horses. And the few horses they had, they put the children on and they walked to Big Foot's camp, and [my great grandmother] wept as she walked. And she wept not only for Sitting Bull being killed the way he was, but also wept because she feared she would not live to have children. And if she did have children, would they be Lakota?
Charlotte Black Elk

Their previous condition in civil life largely explains it. To the colored man the service offers a career; to the white man too often only a refuge.
Secretary of War Redfield Proctor, 1889²³⁰

Wars are waged, won, and lost on the premises of relationships and quarrels between peoples. The relationships and obligations that some have to each other, the people they are charged to protect and often even to themselves, have incredible power in shaping the course of warfare and violence. Throughout the late 1800's the United States government had a variety of obligations to the diverse amount of people living within the modern boundaries of the United States. While the US army, both white and black soldiers alike, and the Sioux and Cheyenne may have required and expected different responsibilities of the federal government, they all had the basic need of support, with the government requiring compliance and service in return. However, there were large scale failures on the government's part that resulted in chaos, violence and ultimately provided for the ground work for the social order in which one's race would largely decide where one fit. This "new" racial order looked very similar to the one of the years before the Civil War. The socio-economic status of white officers and soldiers, black soldiers and

²³⁰ This is in reference to desertion rates among black to be much lower than among white troops. Proctor is quoted in: Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). 332.

Indians such as the Sioux and Cheyenne in the years after 1890 and the end of Indian resistance is largely the result of the success and more often times failures of the federal government to fulfill their obligations to the people living in the United States, regardless of the color of their skin.

By then end of 1890, the Sioux and Cheyenne were living as a conquered people. And like many conquered people, their lives were intrinsically different than their ancestors. However, for some, reservation life was radically different then the lives they led as children. The entire social structure was altered by the change to the stationary life of farming on a reservation. Even if factoring out the reservation, Plains culture would forever be changed by the disappearance of the buffalo herds. The near extinction of the buffalo was a result different factors that came with the white invasion, the railroad being chief among them. Understanding that the railroad was crucial to moving both civilians and the army around, the military encouraged the slaughter of the great herds by “routinely sponsor[ing] and [outfit]ing hunting expedition onto the plains,” and soon the herds were sufficiently thinned to endanger the lifestyle of the plains Indians.²³¹ With the death of the buffalo, also came the end of an” important method of winning recognition, ... traditional diet, clothing, lodgings, and many objects of material culture.”²³² The buffalo herds made the nomadic lifestyle of the nations living on the plains possible. There was a new sense of uncertainty that accompanied thoughts of leaving the reservation, now that the main source of sustenance off the reservation was no longer abundant.²³³ Luther Standing Bear’s childhood took place during this time of immense change. He described the unwelcome shift from hunting buffalo to consuming cattle. In his biography,

²³¹ David D. Smits, “The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883.” In *Western Historical Quarterly*. 25 (1994) 312-338.

²³² Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) 22.

²³³ Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier: 1846-1890*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2003) 221

Luther Standing Bear asks “did you ever stop to think of the difference there is in meat that is killed while in a contented state, and meat that is carried in trains day after day on the hoof?... We knew the difference – which was the reason we could not eat this sort of meat when we first began to receive it.”²³⁴ He also writes that “the plains were covered with dead bison. These had been shot by white people. The Indians never were such wasteful, wanton killers of this noble animal.”²³⁵ Standing Bear’s comments give insight into the disconnect between what white officials believed those on the reservation needed and what the Indians felt was essential to their lives.

War, once part of the backbone of Sioux life, was no longer a central force in the lives of the Sioux when living on a reservation under the control of white authorities. Warfare, once the “principle means of attaining prestige, wealth, and high rank vanished the moment [young warriors] arrived at the agency.”²³⁶ Famous leaders such as Red Cloud and Sitting Bull were forced into new roles that required a different type of leadership. On reservations, agents categorized leaders into two titles, “progressives” and “non-progressives.” “Progressives” were those who cooperated with agents, whether due to the belief that the path to survival lay in the realms of white, or to bribery and a quick exchange of favors.²³⁷ However, there were those who attempted to walk a middle line between, “progressive” and “nonprogressive.” Red Cloud chose this route; he “resisted when [he] could get away with it, gave in when [he] could not.”²³⁸ After he emerged the victor in his self-titled war, Red Cloud largely remained on reservations, and

²³⁴ Luther Standing Bear, *My People The Sioux*, ed. E.A. Brininstool (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1928) 60

²³⁵ Luther Standing Bear, “The Plains Were Covered with Dead Bison,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How West Was Lost*, ed. Colin G. Calloway (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996) 125-126.

²³⁶ Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 22.

²³⁷ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 223.

²³⁸ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 225.

never again took up arms against whites. In 1870, he traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with President Grant. While there he gave a speech to the Secretary of the Interior in which he described the hardships of living on a reservation. He attempted to appeal to the shared experiences between the Sioux and the white Americans' stating, "Father, have you, or any of your friends here got children? Do you want to raise them? Look at me; I come here with all these young men. All of them have children and want to raise them. The white children have surrounded me and have left me nothing but an island."²³⁹ This statement also shows the commitment that Red Cloud has to his people. Here, he felt responsible for the next generation of Sioux. And in Red Cloud's view, going to the white man's capital and arguing for his people was the best way to ensure the success of the next generation. Therefore, succumbing to the will of the whites for the sake of his people²⁴⁰.

Although Red Cloud and Sitting Bull differed in many respects, their concern and commitment to their people was not something that set them apart from one another. While Sitting Bull did not physically fight in the Battle of Little Big Horn, he had prophesied the victory and therefore could add the triumph to his impressive war resume. Following the battle, Sitting Bull's band followed him into exile in Canada to escape the U.S. Army. However, after four years, Sitting Bull surrendered in July 20, 1881. A US army officer who witnessed the event commented that "nothing but nakedness and starvation has driven this man into submission, and that not on his own account but for the sake of his children, of whom he is very fond," did he surrender.²⁴¹ The song Sitting Bull composed following his defeat encompassed a greater feeling

²³⁹ Red Cloud, "Speech to the Secretary of the Interior, 1870," in *Our Heart Fell to the Ground*, 154.

²⁴⁰ As stated in Chapter One, Red Cloud proved to be as adept at diplomatic negotiations as he was on the battlefield. By the end of Red Cloud's trip to Washington, President Grant and his advisors agreed on new boundaries to Red Cloud's reservation that allowed the Sioux to live near Fort Laramie.

²⁴¹ Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016) 310-311.

of many Indians of different nations as the time; “A warrior I have been, Now it is all over, A hard time I have.”²⁴² In 1883, he spoke to a select Senate committee on behalf of his people, seeking to expose the abuses of the reservation system. Sitting Bull stated to the committee, “[the white man official] told me not step aside from the white man’s path, and I told him I would not, and I am doing my best to travel in that path.” The Sioux leader continued on to say:

I want you to take care of my country and respect it. I am looking into the future for the benefit of my children, and that is what I mean, when I say I want my country taken care of. My children will grow up here, and I am looking ahead for their benefit and for the benefit of my children’s children, too; and even beyond that.... I see my people starving.²⁴³

This rhetoric would seem high unlikely from a man who is perhaps best known for his adamant resistance to the power of the white man. However, as a revered leader, Sitting Bull not only had an obligation to the young warriors who had fought for him in the war over the Black Hills, but he also was responsible for the people that continued to follow him and could not fight and defend themselves. Like Red Cloud, Sitting Bull saw when hope for a life away from the whites was extinguished forever. And like Red Cloud, his obligation to the future generations of his people took priority.

During the climax of warfare on the plains, meaning the 1860’s and 1870’s, the federal government’s main concern with the Indians was the land they occupied. Through the efforts of the Army, the Sioux, Cheyenne, and other nations were pushed onto reservations and by the time Sitting Bull returned from Canada there was simply no other place for him to go other than a reservation. Roaming open lands was, bluntly put, no longer physically possible. General Sherman retired from army life in 1884, with the belief that he had accomplished his mission of

²⁴² Sitting Bull, “Sitting Bull’s Surrender Song,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 187.

²⁴³ Sitting Bull, “Report to the Senate Committee, 1883,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*, 189-190.

“pacifying the plains.”²⁴⁴ In the last report to the Secretary of War in which he was still the Commanding General, Congress was told that the “history of the Army during the past year has been one of almost unbroken quiet, during which the troops have been engaged in no more active duties than those of guarding the Indian reservations.”²⁴⁵ The report accounts for Sherman’s belief that General Crook would soon be successful in subduing the Apache in Arizona and with that “all wars will cease in Arizona, and that with them will disappear the complicated Indian question which has tested the patience and courage of our people ever since the first settlement by whites on the continent.”²⁴⁶ However, now a new question arose in regards to the Indians; now that they were subdued, what would the government do with them?

The government realized their new problems in regards to the Indians was that of the Indian living on the reservation and the resulting new obligations they had to them. When reformist-groups emerged in the 1880’s with ideas on how to “civilize” the Indian, the government was quick to oblige them. Quakers had long been involved with government Indian policy as President Grant had embraced some Quaker ideals when constructing his peace policy. He is even thought to have said “If you can make Quakers out of the Indians it will take the fight out of them. Let us have peace.”²⁴⁷ Calling themselves “Friends of the Indians” reformers were largely “well educated, comfortably well off business and professional people, respected pillars of their communities, Protestant, deeply religious, practicing Christian living on a daily basis, moral, patriotic, in every way ‘Americans’ in the conventional image of the 1880s.”²⁴⁸ The reformers sought to impose two drastically different objectives into American Indian life,

²⁴⁴ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 420.

²⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, *Report of the Secretary of War, being part of the message and documents communicated to the two Houses of Congress at the beginning of the first session of the Forty-eight Congress*. (1883) 5.

²⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, *Report of the Secretary of War, being part of the message and documents communicated to the two Houses of Congress at the beginning of the first session of the Forty-eight Congress*. (1883) 5.

²⁴⁷ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 127-128.

²⁴⁸ Utley, *The Indian Frontier*, 202-203.

“individual ownership of land and a white man’s education.”²⁴⁹ In the 1885 Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, the exact question of the future of the Indian is asked, with the response being “he should become an intelligent citizen of the United States,” with the definition of “citizen” being culturally white going unwritten.²⁵⁰ This report speaks to the patronizingly paternalistic view reformers took to Indians when it states “They are the wards of the Government. Is not a guardian’s first duty so to educate and care for his wards as to make them able to care for themselves?” The report serves to attack both tribal organization and the reservation, and does so by advocating for giving individual Indian families their own plots of land. The report argues that the reservation system has allowed them to be “fenced off from all intercourse with the better whites,” to the native peoples’ detriment.²⁵¹ The reformers received their wish in the form of the General Allotment Act of 1887, better known as the Dawes Act. This Act gave each head of a family a plot of land while conveniently allowing the government to negotiate for any surplus land once each household head had his plot.²⁵²

Reformers and the government alike sought to “uplift” the Indian from their state of squalor and savagery by giving them a Christian education. Day and boarding schools were established both on and off the reservation. Perhaps the most famous of all being Captain Richard Henry Pratt’s Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Pratt coined the term that encompassed the general governing idea behind the reformers; “Kill the Indian and Save the

²⁴⁹ Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping*, 420-421.

²⁵⁰ Merrill E. Gates, “From the Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1885,” in *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 4th ed. Ed. Colin G. Calloway (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s 2012) 449-454.

²⁵¹ Gates, “From the Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1885,” in *First Peoples*, 449- 454.

²⁵² Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux*, 43-44.

Man.”²⁵³ While in the eyes of the reformer, schools such as Carlisle had greater “qualitative success than any other educational method attempted,” as children were completely cut off from their families’ cultural heritage, and solely exposed to white influences, this success came at a great cost to the “reformed” children.²⁵⁴

Luther Standing Bear attended the Carlisle school and wrote extensively about it. When he first saw boys who had returned to his reservation after attending the school he thought “with their new clothes on they looked like white men.”²⁵⁵ He approached going east to school as if he were going off to war, writing that “this chance to go East would prove that I was brave if I were to accept... it did not occur me at the time that I was going away to learn the ways of the white man. My idea was that I was leaving the reservation and going to stay away long enough to do some brave deed, and then come home again alive.”²⁵⁶ Carlisle was not the welcoming nor friendly place that some had expected. They were only given bread and water and for time Luther slept on the cold hard ground. Soon they were given white names, and made to dress like white men, which meant cutting their hair. When the barber cut off Luther’s hair, he describes it as an almost life changing moment that speaks to the larger experience of many Indian children sent to white school. When Luther’s hair was cut short, “it hurt my feelings to such an extent that the tears came into my eyes,” and afterwards “a new thought came into my head. I felt that I was no more Indian, but would be an imitation of a white man.”²⁵⁷

Children of Carlisle were disconnected from their culture but very much distant from white society. Zitkala, a girl from the Dakota plains, also attended boarding school. She

²⁵³ Collin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*. 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012) 413.

²⁵⁴ Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 35-36.

²⁵⁵ Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux*, 124.

²⁵⁶ Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux*, 141.

²⁵⁷ Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux*, 141.

described her school life as an “iron routine” forced upon the children by the “civilizing machine.”²⁵⁸ After the death of one of her friends while at school, she “grew bitter” and “within a week [she] was again actively testing the chains which tightly bound [her] individuality like a mummy for burial.” Zitkala went on to become a school-teacher but felt detached from her heritage while continuing her schooling stating;

For the white man’s papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother’s simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also... Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends.²⁵⁹

Much like Zitkala, once returned home to their reservations, many boarding school educated youth felt as if they were “virtual aliens among their own people,” and found no use for their newly learned skill sets.²⁶⁰ Here, reformers at the behest of the government fulfilled their wish of giving those living on reservations the skills to survive in a white man’s world. However, they failed to provide a way or means to put these skills to use, while at the same time ignoring the cultural differences that made such a life abhorrent to the Sioux and other native peoples. Zitkala sums up this crisis of ignorance when she writes “few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization.”²⁶¹

American Indians were not the only ones to whom the government felt they were obliged to. In the years after the Civil War, black men continued to enlist in the army. However, this was a largely illiterate population. In order to help combat this problem a chaplain was assigned to each black regiment, unlike white regiments, to “serve as teachers... and to minister to the

²⁵⁸ Zitkala-Sa, “The Melancholy of those Black Days,” in *First Peoples*, 464-469.

²⁵⁹ Zitkala-Sa, “The Melancholy of those Black Days,” in *First Peoples*, 464-469.

²⁶⁰ Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*.

²⁶¹ Zitkala-Sa, “The Melancholy of those Black Days,” in *First Peoples*, 464-469.

unique religious needs to these men because of their distinct African American Christianity.”²⁶² Chaplains were to “instruct the soldiers in the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic.”²⁶³ The program appeared largely successful in the West. Chaplain George G. Mullins served the 25th infantry in the late 1870’s. Mullins was pleased with the progress his men had made and boasted about it in a report to his commanding officer, writing “morally considered, they have certainly made slow but constant improvement during” the past year. Mullins also shared that many of the soldiers he served had an “anxiety to be well thought of at Army Headquarters and throughout the States. This is the bottom secret of their patient toil, and surprising progress in the effort to get at least an elementary education.”²⁶⁴ Mullins reported school attendance was very large.

Early on, the chaplains such as Mullins who served the buffalo soldiers were white, but in 1884 Charles V. Plummer became the first black chaplain when he was assigned to the Ninth Calvary. Black chaplains existed during the Civil War even though “higher educational and ecclesiastical standards of the chaplaincy meant that fewer black clergymen qualified,” however, all fourteen of them resigned at the close of the war in order to focus on “helping the freed slaves during Reconstruction.”²⁶⁵ Ultimately, five black men served as chaplains for the United States Colored Troops during the military conquest of the West. The men who served were all highly accomplished leaders in their own right who continued to assist their fellow man through both religion and the military. Four of the five were born into slavery. Their duties while serving

²⁶² Alan K. Lamm, “Buffalo Soldier Chaplains of the Old West,” in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black Soldiers Anthology*, ed. Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2007) 68.

²⁶³ William Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Calvary in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1967) 6.

²⁶⁴ Chaplain George C Mullins, “A Chaplain’s Report: Discipline, Morals, and Education,” in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldier: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West*, ed. Frank N. Schubert (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2003) 85-86.

²⁶⁵ Lamm, “Buffalo Soldier Chaplains of the Old West,” in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 70.

included “teaching Sunday school, leading Sunday worship, counseling with soldiers, visiting men on sick call,” and teaching basic education.²⁶⁶

For example, Allen Allensworth served with the Twenty-Fourth Infantry and while with them, revolutionized the military education system. Allensworth set up a school system in which the brightest soldiers worked as teachers, used innovative teaching methods such as visual aides, and set up a graded curriculum. When he was not given adequate supplies such as textbooks and pencils, Allensworth worked to attain donations or purchased supplies with his own funds. He also taught more than basic needs; instructing men in vocational skills.²⁶⁷ Allensworth, along with the other four chaplains believed that the military proved the best opportunity for black men at the time as the army could function as a “training school for young black men, teaching them the skills needed to succeed as soldiers and as civilians after their discharge from service.”²⁶⁸ Here, the government succeeded to some extent in supporting a newly freed population in regards to those who served in the army.

However, much like in the case of “civilizing” Indian children, black soldiers were not always given the chance to fully succeed, nor rewarded adequately when they did, even if they were equipped with the proper tools such as an education and useful skill sets like printing and clerkships. Race was an enormous force that no one was immune from, including the chaplains. Often serving as leaders in their communities, some Chaplains used their positions to advocate for change and equality. Henry V. Plummer was one such man. Plummer “actively promoted temperance, sought decent quarters, wrote antiracist articles and called for Africa’s colonization.”²⁶⁹ Plummer was eventually dismissed from the army following a guilty verdict on

²⁶⁶ Lamm, “Buffalo Soldier Chaplains of the Old West,” in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 71.

²⁶⁷ Lamm, “Buffalo Soldier Chaplains of the Old West,” in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 78.

²⁶⁸ Lamm, “Buffalo Soldier Chaplains of the Old West,” in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 78-79.

²⁶⁹ Lamm, “Buffalo Soldier Chaplains of the Old West,” in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 71

the charge of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman and for fraternization. His charge and sentence resulted from when he was caught having a drink with some enlisted men while off duty. Historian Alan Lamm makes the argument that Plummer's real crime "was that he was too outspoken for a black man in the Jim Crow era."²⁷⁰

It was rare for a black soldier to be promoted or receive any sort of raise. Many black soldiers and cavalymen wrote to journals and newspapers as a way to air their grievances. In 1879, an article written by the "Colored Men on the General Staff" at Fort Stockton, was published in order to bring attention to the issue of lack of promotions. The men write that they

believe it to be a well known fact of long standing that not more than two or three colored soldiers have ever been rewarded for 'their meritorious conduct, soldierly bearing, unceasing endurance, and eternal faithfulness to the United States government,' with an appointment as either ordnance sergeant, commissary sergeant or hospital steward, although several have been made to perform some of these duties from time to time, with no other compensation that that of a private soldier.²⁷¹

The article makes the argument that these men would continue to provide the same services "just as well when paid for it" and if paid would perhaps care more and put more effort into doing the job correctly.²⁷² It points to the reason behind that lack of black men on the general staff being "either too much prejudice against the colored man in the Army, or else his officers are not sufficiently interested in him to see that the men are justly rewarded."²⁷³ While the government had freed African Americans from the bonds of slavery, it had yet to fulfill the obligation of providing an opportunity for a better life for them.

²⁷⁰ Lamm, "Buffalo Soldier Chaplains of the Old West," in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 71

²⁷¹ "Complaint About Discrimination in Selection of Sergeants to Noncommissioned Staff Positions," in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 91-92.

²⁷² "Complaint About Discrimination in Selection of Sergeants to Noncommissioned Staff Positions," in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 91-92.

²⁷³ "Complaint About Discrimination in Selection of Sergeants to Noncommissioned Staff Positions," in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 91-92.

A small portion of men were able to advance to an officer ranking. Three commissioned officers graduated from West Point and went on to lead the black troops. Henry O. Flipper graduated with the class of '76, fiftieth in his class and by all accounts appeared to be at the starting line of a very promising career, however racism forced Flipper down a different path than originally intended.²⁷⁴ Flipper was lauded by his superiors for his performance in the war against Victorio, an Apache leader, on the Southern Plains. However, once returned to Fort Davis, his relations with his new white superior officers quickly deteriorated. Captain Nicholas Nolan was a staunch supporter and close friend of Flipper's through out Flipper's short time in the military. In a letter to his friend, Robert Price, Nolan described some of the racial tension that immediately tinged life where ever Flipper went. Nolan expresses his outrage at the actions of a "lady of some officer" who had written to some Northern newspapers about Nolan's friendship and defense of Flipper, which Nolan believed to be "evidently, done on account of his color, and no allowance [was] made for his grand attainments." Born in Ireland, Nolan appears to identify a common experience with Flipper and writes "I am satisfied that he does not consider that all Irishmen are opposed to his race, but willing to take the hand of all who have been oppressed."²⁷⁵ Flipper was eventually accused of mishandling funds and once accused was thrown into a "6 ½ X 4 ½-foot cell... no visitors were allowed without the consent of the commanding officers." This was unusually harsh treatment, "unprecedented in view of the alleged offense," according to general practices of the time. Flipper's plight quickly caught the attention of high ranking officers, with William Sherman eventually commenting on the unusual case.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Bruce J. Dinges, "The Court-Martial of Lt. Henry O. Flipper: An Example of Black-White Relationships in the Army, 1881," in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 129.

²⁷⁵ Nicholas Nolan, "Lieutenant Henry Flipper's Competence, Character, and treatment By Other Officers," in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 89-90.

²⁷⁶ Dinges, "The Court Martial of Henry O. Flipper," in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 134.

When the case went to court, it was clear from the beginning that there was a dearth of evidence against Flipper, while he was able to compile a case in which many testified to his outstanding character. One unidentified white officer was quoted as saying “Flipper’s points are all well taken and if he were a white man he would upset the verdict and sentence; but he is a colored man, and I for one would not vote for any colored man being an officer.”²⁷⁷ Flipper was eventually found not guilty on an embezzlement charge but was convicted of “conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman.” He was dishonorably discharged but continued to fight to be reinstated for many years to no avail. Flipper, a WestPoint graduate, was essentially thrown out of the Army simply because some white officers were uncomfortable and felt threatened by the idea of a black officer. Once again, the government had provided the means for success in the form of a WestPoint education but then failed to provide a path to turn successful skills into a successful life.

Discrimination when promoting or recognizing men also was evident when looking at the Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor is the most distinguished award that can be bestowed upon any individual for acts of heroism. The award was established during the Civil War and for a time, was the only award given out. Since its inception in March of 1863, 3,470 medals have been given out. However of the 3,000 plus recipients, only eighty-nine are black. During the times of war in the West, eighteen black soldiers and scouts received the Medal of Honor.²⁷⁸ These numbers could point to some assumptions of the time, one being that while the buffalo soldiers were often praised for their heroics and valor, it was never expected or accepted that their heroics and valor could match those of a white man. This speaks to a larger theme of the time; that being the wish of reformers and some in the government alike to help raise African

²⁷⁷ Dinges, “The Court Martial of Henry O. Flipper in *Buffalo Soldiers in the West*, 138.

²⁷⁸ Preston E. Amos, *Above and Beyond in the West: Black Medal of Honor Winners, 1870-1890*, (Washington DC: Potomac Corral, The Westerners, 1974)115.

Americans out of the status of slavery and the corresponding effects such as a lack of education and access to the voting booth. However, these people could only be raised so high in late nineteenth-century America. While they hoped the Buffalo soldiers could learn to read and write in order to better serve their country, they could not be allowed to read or write better than a white man. Blacks could be encouraged to be successful, but never more successful than whites.

Race both provided for shared and differing experiences between American Indians and the buffalo soldiers. Even in an environment such as the West that made racial boundaries within a social hierarchy more permeable, there was still an incapability for some to see past physical differences and look at shared experiences. In 1880, Senator Blanche Bruce, the first black man to serve a full term in the Senate, made an argument for a bill concerning Indian policy. Bruce argued that past Indian policy that worked to achieve “redemption from savagery and [the Indian] perpetuity of as a race, has been only sufficient to supply that class of exceptions to the rule necessary to prove the selfishness of the policy,” meaning policies were enacted to “civilize” Indians without giving them the tools nor expecting them to act in a “civilized” manner.²⁷⁹ Bruce is most likely referring to the government rations given out in reservations to support those living there. He then goes on to say the best way to help the Indians would be to make them citizens. Bruce also advocated for the “division of land in severalty.” Much like the reformers of the time Bruce maintained that “the Indian is human, and no matter what his traditions or his habits, if you will locate him and put him in contact, and hold him in contact, with the forces of our civilization, his fresh, rugged nature will respond.”²⁸⁰ Here, Senator Branch is clearly identifying with white society and aligning his interests and expectations with them. Much like whites at the time, Branch failed to see race as something beyond the color of ones skin and into the culture of

²⁷⁹ Senator Blanche Bruce, “Senator Bruce and the Indians, 1880,” in *Distant Horizon: Documents from the Nineteenth-Century American West*. Ed. Gary Noy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 339-341.

²⁸⁰ Bruce, “Senator Bruce and the Indians, 1880,” in *Distant Horizon*, 340-341.

the Indian. If Branch felt any irony or sense of shared cause when arguing for citizenship for American Indians, in an era of Jim Crow and Black Codes made African Americans citizens only in name and nothing else, he did not state it. Perhaps this bears a similar resemblance to white attitudes to Indians and blacks. The wish being to elevate their status but always keeping the other at an arms length; to be exactly like white culture, but with the lingering inescapable fact that you are not white yourself, which will always create a divide.

It can be argued that 1891 marked the beginning of the first time that United States experienced peace and in fact employed a peacetime army. And in peacetime, soldiers could hope for a better quality of life. Even before the end of Indian resistance, “official concerns for the well-being of the enlisted men developed far beyond the expectation of any soldier who served prior to the Civil War.”²⁸¹ While the image of the regular soldiers was negative when the Plains Indian Wars began in earnest, by 1890 soldiers were serving longer and re-enlisting in higher rates than in years past, pointing to the increased satisfaction with their time in the service.²⁸² And in the years following the Wounded Knee massacre, military officers and Congress alike made concentrated efforts to discourage immigrants from continuing to enlist in the army. In 1894, Congress passed a law requiring those enlisting for the first time “either be citizens or have made a legal declaration of their intent to become citizens and they must be able to read, write and speak English.” Historian Edward M Coffman describes this as the “Americanization” of the army.²⁸³ This trend points to the reestablishment of the old social hierarchy that had managed to persist in the East after the Civil War. Once the era violence finally came to an end, the army began to encourage white purity in their ranks. The buffalo

²⁸¹ Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 328.

²⁸² Coffman, *The Old Army*, 329.

²⁸³ Coffman, *The Old Army*, 331.

soldiers continued to fight with valor through the Spanish-American War. However, by World War I, blacks were largely placed in non-combat roles, providing kitchen and supplies work.²⁸⁴ The U.S. Army became slowly perceived as more white than in the past with the discouragement of enlisting immigrants and downgrading of duties for African Americans.

Now that peace had been achieved at home with the end of concentrated American Indian resistance, America turned its gaze beyond its land-locked borders. The frontier was declared over in 1890, but the United States was just beginning to test its strength in international waters.²⁸⁵ While America became more involved and imperialistic in its relations with Cuba, Hawaii and the Philippines, the army took on a role that largely left out those who were not “white.” The very structure of command in the military began to change to accommodate America’s new role as a world power.²⁸⁶ The power of individual generals slowly eroded as a new system of strong strategic planning emerged. Less value was placed on experience in favor of academic learning. In the past, older men “claimed that books and combat and field service provided the only means by which one could learn about war.” This was true to a certain extent as the men who were most successful when fighting Indian nations, Generals Miles and Crook, “developed their methods of warfare in response to field experience rather than from academic instruction.”²⁸⁷ As America moved towards the turn over to a new century, the memories and lessons of the wars over the Plains with the Sioux and Cheyenne appeared largely forgotten as with the new century came new frontiers to conquer.

With the end of the frontier came the solidification of a largely race-based social order. White culture had dominated the country since the American Revolution, and it would be hard to

²⁸⁴ Amos, *Above and Beyond in the West*, 39.

²⁸⁵ Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy: 1865-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 202.

²⁸⁶ Coffman, *The Old Army*, 331.

²⁸⁷ Wooster, *The Military and the United States Indian Policy*, 204.

argue that it does not still rule in modern America. The chaos and ensuing violence that plagued the plains between 1866 and 1890 provided a small window of time where race did not have to dictate one's life. In this time, the Sioux and Cheyenne could entertain the thought that they might win their land back; their physical, cultural and spiritual power might prevail in the face of white invasion. A black man could be born a slave to a white master, and die with the ability to read and write as well as any white man, a Congressional Medal of Honor to his name and be pilot of his own destiny. Immigrants could also find a place for themselves in the army, away from the poverty of an urban city. However, twenty-four years is only a section of a person's life and only a fleeting moment in the history of a nation. A wave of failures on the part of the government and white society allowed for a return to a society in which race could largely dictate one's success. Whites believed they wanted to "civilize and save" the Indian, but the realities and consequences of what this would really mean for both white and Indian society were never fully realized. The government and the army wanted to shape the best possible soldier out of the black man but refused to see the success of this endeavor as anything other than a threat to the white soldier and thus black men would be ousted from places of honor in the army and bared from paths to success by black codes in a Jim Crow era world as civilians. Over the history of time Sioux, Cheyenne, the US Army and the black soldiers paths have converged and diverged. During no other time have their paths impacted each other as significantly as during the period of warfare on the Plains in the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, there is little to suggest that these groups ever contemplated the idea that their paths could combine and run in the same direction. In hindsight, war and its results tends to have an inevitable quality. However, during times of conflict, everything can seem different, dangerous, and scary, and some react differently to it than others. The Sioux and Cheyenne fought in the belief that they

could hold on to their old way of life, while African Americans struggled and clung to the idea that their situation could be changed for the better. In the end, survival became the ultimate goal and each group did survive, if not altered in irreversible ways.

Did this time of violence and chaos shape America or did Americans shape this time through violence and chaos? When choosing to encompass the Sioux, Cheyenne, buffalo soldiers and the U.S. Army into the term “American” then it becomes clear that Americans shaped this time through chaos and violence. None of these groups played a passive role in this era. Even if the race dynamics of the time attempted to oppress the experiences of the Sioux, Cheyenne and the Buffalo Soldiers, each group played an important role in the shaping of the West. Along with the US Army, they all had both common and unique experiences that culminate into marking the years of the Plains Indian Wars as some of the most exciting, saddening, dynamic and profound times in the history of the United States.

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