**The Triumph of Red Cloud’s War and the Tragedy of the Submission of Native American Culture**

Austin Lucas

Junior Division

Historical Paper

Paper Length: 2,496 words

The initial start of increased tensions with the Native Americans in the Powder River territory began in the 1860s when gold was found in Montana. This new discovery sent people racing across the nation, through Native American land. Since this broke treaty arrangements agreed upon by the United States and various Indian nations, it severely angered the Natives when people began to trespass on their ancestral lands. This provoked the first ever Indian-American war in which the Natives triumphed over America. The war, Red Cloud’s War, was ended in 1868 by the Fort Laramie Treaty, and after that, Red Cloud kept peace with the Americans, though he continued to lobby for Indian rights. Tragedy grew as the Native Americans were pushed off their promised lands and were forced into reservations. In 1877, Red Cloud began a school for the education of Indian children. Since then the Red Cloud Indian School has grown into one of the foremost Native American schools in the nation.

**The Route to Gold:**

The Montana Gold Rush in Virginia City led to the creation of the Bozeman trail in 1863. The Bozeman trail was pioneered through Crow and Sioux hunting grounds to the gold in Montana. “Although the Civil War was still in progress, thousands of adventures and fortune seekers nevertheless flocked to the area, and pressure mounted to establish access to the Virginia City gold fields” (Woods 1-2). John Bozeman pioneered the shortest trail, and the general public and the United States Army accepted it as the new route to gold. “[Though] the Bozeman Route reduced the distance required by other routes to reach the gold fields by nearly 400 miles, it also cut through hunting grounds reserved for the Sioux, the Northern Cheyenne, and the Arapaho” (Woods 2). Most Native Americans were very hostile toward travelers going through their hunting grounds, and many would raid against the wagon trains, leaving men with nothing except the clothes on their backs. Though some Natives were still on good terms with the United States and tried to prevent hostile encounters with them, “[the] Bozeman Trail itself appears to have created little conflict between Crows and whites…. In a way, opening the trail benefitted the Crows because it created new opportunities for contact with independent traders” (Rzeczkowski 34). This helped increase the trading between the Americans and the Crow and prevented the Crow from becoming hostile towards the United States.

Tensions began to rise even more after John Bozeman was murdered in an encounter with two Blackfeet while traveling the trail. “They shook hands with Mr. B. and proffered the same politeness to me, which I declined by presenting my Henry Rifle at them, and at the same moment B. remarked, ‘I am fooled; they are Blackfeet’… the Indians fired, the ball taking effect in his right breast… when another shot took effect in his left breast it brought poor B. to the ground, dead” (Herbard 222). John Bozeman’s friend, Tom Coover, took a shot to his shoulder and fled to a nearby army camp. From what Coover had gleaned, there was a party of Blackfeet seeking loot and scalps, going across the trail. Though the Blackfeet were aggressive, they weren’t much compared to the Sioux; “the Sioux [were] the most persistent, aggressive, and expansionist, allying with all other tribes in their efforts to take rich Crow lands for themselves” (Charles River Editors 21). This led to a conflict between the United States and the Sioux as they began to turn their aggression towards the people and army of the United States.

**Rising Tensions:**

 The United States sent out the Powder River Expedition on September 1, 1865, as an attempt to forcibly solve the Indian crisis on the plains. The United States was fighting the Civil War so the expedition was “under-equipped, and without enough men,” (Charles River Editors 22). This forced the expedition to end early without making any real headway in solving the Native American situation. The motivation of the soldiers was low, none of them having seen home or their families since they were drafted to fight the Civil War. One of the major problems that came with low morale was soldiers’ refusal to march because the expedition’s soldiers had expected to be discharged to their homes and families after fighting the majority of the Civil War, and not in the middle of nowhere fighting another war.

It was hard for the expedition to navigate the plains, and with a lack of maps and limited surveys of the region, the expedition faced increasing hardships, and that, coupled with lack of supplies, logistics, and communication beyond runners and scouts, quickly took its toll (Charles River Editors 22). The expedition was “plagued by bad planning and inadequate supplies” (Hein 1) and faced a multitude of diseases and starvation throughout the excursion. The whole expedition was a failure, mainly due to lack of knowledge of the terrain. The only ‘success’ of the expedition consisted of surveys for the construction of three forts, planned to help defend the trail and the people traveling on it. During their brief existence, the forts would be under constant siege by the Indians hindering the chance for peaceful negotiations between the Americans and Natives. “As a natural consequence of the antiquated treaty… and the rising power of the hostile Sioux, the federal government gathered leaders from the local tribes in an effort to ratify a new treaty” (Charles River Editors 23). The treaty arrangements of 1865 at Fort Laramie went smoothly until Col. Henry Carrington arrived with 700 men and instructions to construct three new forts along the Bozeman Trail (McCaig 1). The damage had been done, and Red Cloud instantly cut short his participation in the council.

 For a time, Red Cloud refused to attend negotiations regarding the Bozeman Trail, but a later invitation swayed him to make the trek to Fort Laramie once again. At the table was Colonel Carrington, preparing the Army to hold the treaty negotiations against an Indian attack. “Rising to his feet… Red Cloud pointed right at the Colonel and declared, ‘You are the white eagle who has come to steal the road…. I will talk with you no more. I and my people will go now, and we will fight you! As long as I live, I will fight for the last hunting grounds of my people!’” (Hebard 178). After declaring his statement, Red Cloud drew his blanket around him and left to begin what is known as Red Cloud's War.

**Red Cloud’s War:**

Red Cloud left the meeting and immediately began to prepare for war against the United States. Throughout the following weeks, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Fetterman continued to express contempt about the Natives and their fighting. He claimed to be able to “ride through the whole Sioux nation with only 80 men” (Woods 1) and this ultimately led to him wanting to go out and end the Indian threat. In November 1866 Red Cloud raised the intensity of his raids as Fetterman continued to witness Carrington do little to nothing to stop it (Charles River Editors 31). Henry B. Carrington was a noted engineer, but had never faced true combat before, and was trying to hold out against Indian raids, rather than fight back. He was letting woodcutting parties get attacked nearly every time they went out, and never chose to do more than send an armed escort with the parties. The Natives used a form of guerilla warfare, trying to draw the armed soldiers away, “[Indian] raiding parties were surprised to see how susceptible Army troops were pursuing decoys into ambush situations” (Charles River Editors 31).

On December 21, 1866, Red Cloud’s warriors started to attack a wagon train 6 miles from Fort Phil Kearny, “Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Fetterman, the senior Captain at the Post, claimed that his seniority as captain entitled him to command the relieving party, and his request was complied with” (Carrington 143). Fetterman was now in a position to fight back against the Natives but was drawn in by tribal decoys past Lodge Trail Ridge, where Carrington had directly ordered him not to go (Woods 1). He and his men fought for their lives as thousands of Indians ambushed the small party of 80 men from both sides of the trail. “Within half an hour, Fetterman and all 80 of his men were dead” (Ostlind 1). They kept fighting until the last of them died, outnumbered and trying to withdraw back to the fort. The Indians were savages and after completely massacring Fetterman and his troops; the dead soldiers were “stripped, scalped, and mutilated” (Ostlind 1). After the distant sounds of the battle died away at Fort Phil Kearny, Carrington “sent out another detail under the command of Ten Eyck” (Charles River Editors 37) to try and help Fetterman any way they could. Ten Eyck arrived at the battleground to find “mutilated bodies freezing into grotesque positions” (Exploring Off the Beaten Path). As soon as word got back through different military channels and press, General Cooke received the news and with no knowledge of the facts, he instantly blamed Carrington. The battle dramatized the failure of the army’s Indian policy and gave new impetus calls for peace with Native Americans and particularly Red Cloud.

After the drastic defeat of Fetterman, only two other true battles happened between the United States and Red Cloud. In August 1867, the Cheyenne and Sioux launched separate but

seemingly coordinated attacks known as the Hayfield Fight and the Wagon Box Fight (Woods 1). During the Hayfield Fight of August 1, 1867, 19 soldiers and six civilians held off a superior Indian force with few casualties. They were from Fort Smith under command of Lieutenant Sigismund Sternberg and equipped with new converted breech-loading Springfield Rifles which fired faster than any of the weapons Native Americans had ever faced. They fought for a few hours and Lieutenant Sigismund Sternberg only ended up losing three men, with three more wounded. In the Wagon Box Fight on August 2, 1867, the Americans faced a superior force with only 31 men. “They managed to hold at bay a force of several hundred with just three killed and two wounded” (Woods 1). The soldiers, led by Captain James Powell, positioned themselves behind wagons that had been removed from their running gear and fired at the Natives from the small cracks and openings between the wagons. By the end of the day, only three members of Powell’s men were dead and the Indian deaths ranged from 60 to 500. Though the Army achieved tactical victory in these battles, “the government concluded a peaceful settlement was the quickest and most appropriate action” (Brown 1). In 1868, the government signed a treaty at Fort Laramie that, in short, ordered the forts to be dismantled and stating that the Powder River Country and the Black Hills were reserved for the Lakotas forever, marking the end of Red Cloud’s War. As the treaty read, “The government of the United States desires peace, and its honor is hereby pledged to keep it. The Indians desire peace, and they now pledge their honor to maintain it” (Treaty of Fort Laramie 1868).

**Indian Rights and Surrender:**

Red Cloud surrendered to the United States and began to help prevent other Indian conflicts, “Red Cloud, the warrior, had indeed become Red Cloud, the peacemaker” (Paul 192).

After the treaty signing in 1868, Red Cloud kept peace with the United States, although he did encourage Native Americans to resist America. “He agreed to abandon the warpath and relocate his people to a large reservation” (Red Cloud 5). He moved his tribe to the reservation that the U.S. wanted him to, north of Nebraska, but west of the Missouri river. Sadly, due to rapid immigration to the United States, people began to migrate west, forcing Red Cloud to move his people again. “In 1878 Red Cloud agreed to relocate his people to the Pine Ridge Reservation” (Red Cloud 5). As more and more people flooded into the country the Indian lifestyle began to slowly wear away forcing Red Cloud to “helplessly witness the slow erosion of his people’s way of life over the next 30 years” (Red Cloud 5). In 1881 Red Cloud lost his status as a chief, living thereafter in retirement on the reservation. Many people felt as though he was no longer an effective leader, and much of his influence was lost as he grew older.

**Red Cloud’s Legacy and School**

In his later years of life, Red Cloud discouraged participation in many different Indian wars. “In 1890, the old chief discouraged participation in the warpath Ghost Dance, attempting to avert the troubles that had led to the Wounded Knee Massacre” (Red Cloud 5). Even though he was in opposition of fighting the Americans, he still did his best to lobby for Native American rights until his death in 1909, even founding the first Native American school on the Pine Ridge Reservation. “During the year of Chief Red Cloud’s death, Holy Rosary’s enrollment surpassed 200.” (Red Cloud Indian School 1). The school was going strong when Red Cloud passed away and has only gained momentum since then. “Red Cloud Indian School… has been providing Lakota children with a holistic, high-quality education for over 125 years” (Hynes 1). The school is doing very well, even though it is faced with the hard conditions of the reservation like drug and alcoholism. The students at the school have been taught a mixture of essential skills, “standard core curriculum with a focus on Lakota history, language, and culture” (Hynes 3). Though sadly the kids there face a much higher death toll than that of the U.S. similar to that of 3rd World Countries. “Life expectancy on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is the lowest in the United States—twenty years less than communities just 400 miles away” (History). Even facing the high drug and alcohol use rate, and the lower life expectancy, the school is giving these kids a shot at a normal life, and a chance to become functioning members of society.

 Red Cloud Indian School continues to help Native Americans on the Pine Ridge Reservation learn new information and go to college. One woman that attended Red Cloud School, Dr. Dena Wilson, went to one of America’s top Medical schools in Seattle, Washington, and started to become an Indian Health Service Doctor. After med school, she traveled to Tuscan, Arizona and was offered a job as a cardiologist, in the Native American Cardiology Program. She continues to thrive and help her people by doing what she loves, all thanks to Red Cloud School. The stories of others that Red Cloud School impacted are all across their site, continuing to show just how amazing and significant this school's role has played in the Native American community at Pine Ridge Reservation.

Annotated Bibliography

**Primary Sources**

Brown, Grant A. “Red Cloud’s War: A Failure to Effectively Coordinate the Instruments Of

National Power.” Master of Military Art And Science: Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2016.

 This report was by the army showing how they were fighting the Native

Americans. This helped see the perspective of the army facing the Indians. This was used for inside facts and details on the strategy and fighting of the U.S. Army.

Carrington, Frances C*. My Army Life and the Fort Phil Kearny Massacre: With an Account of*

*the Celebration of “Wyoming Opened.”* New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.

This is a primary account of Francis C. Carrington during Red Cloud’s War. This

gave factual evidence on what happened in Francis C. Carrington did in Fort Phil Kearny.

Cozzens, Peter. Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: The Long War for the Northern

Plains. vol. 4. Stackpole Books, 2004.

This source was about Indian wars in the west and helped with information on Red Cloud’s War. It was used for background information and to help elaborate on the details of the war.

Hafen, Le Roy R., and Ann W. Hafen. *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers’ Expedition of*

*1865*. Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1961.

This is a book relating to Powder River Campaigns, going in-depth on Patrick Connors Powder River Expedition. It helped broaden the view on the expedition, and define the chronological order in which his expedition went.

Herbard, Grace Raymond and E.A. Brininstool: *The Bozeman Trail.* Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark

Company, 1922.

This source gave exact evidence on what the Bozeman Trail effected, and how it exacerbated tensions between the settlers and Natives. This helped by giving background information on the trail and was used to give an account of John Bozeman's death.

“Horse Creek Treaty of Fort Laramie 1851.” *AmericanIndian.si.edu*. Web. 30 October

2018.

This article is the Treaty of 1851, going into the exacts of the original agreement between the Indians and the U.S. This helped evaluate the reasons why Native Americans were extremely mad when the Americans violated this treaty. This was used for explaining why the Indians’ were upset because the United States had gone against its word in the treaty.

Hynes, Thomas. “How a High-Achieving School in One of America's Poorest Areas is Saving

the Local Community.” *BusinessInsider.com.* 26 August 2017. Web. 4 October 2018.

This article gave different important statistics about Red Cloud School. This helped to show the life on Pine Ridge Reservation and gave important information about the success and life of the school.

Paul, Eli R. *Autobiography of Red Cloud War Leader of the Oglalas.* Helena, Montana: Montana

Historical Society Press, 1997.

This book was an autobiography of Red Cloud. It told about his early life and battles, briefly going into his war in the end. This gave factual evidence on his early life and what happened immediately after the war.

“The Reservation.” *RedCloudSchool.org.* Web. 29 October 2018.

This gave the statistics of the reservation, such as the economic realities and health and welfare. This helped in showing the good and bad things about the reservation and how they are still managing to keep pushing forward and continuing Red Cloud’s goal.

“Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868).” *Our Documents.* Web. 6 October 2018.

This document is the treaty that ended Red Cloud’s War. This helped show the resolution to the war and what the requests and deals were. It was used for giving evidence to the end of the war and where all of the Indian tribes and land went.

**Secondary Sources**

Hebard, Grace Raymond, and E.A. Brininstool: *The Bozeman Trail, vol. 2.*

This source was about the Bozeman Trail, how it started and how it affected the nation. It helped me see what the Bozeman Trail caused, and was used for a primary quote said by Red Cloud.

Hein, Ellis. “Connor’s Powder River Expedition of 1865.” *WyoHistory.org*. 8 November 2014.

Web. 6 October 2018.

This source provided an in-depth view on the Powder River Expedition. It helped by showing what happened through the expedition and was used in this paper to give evidence to soldiers low morale during the Powder River Expedition.

History.com Editors. “Indians massacre Fetterman and eighty soldiers.” *History.com*. November

16, 2009. Web. 6 October 2018.

This source was about the Fetterman Massacre. It gave various opinions on how the fight might have gone down. This article helped elaborate on the massacre and gave information about what happened during the battle.

Johansen, Bruce E. “Red Cloud.” *AmericanHistory.com.* 2018. Web. 3 October 2018.

This website gave an overview of Red Cloud’s life and what it was like for him when the Bozeman Trail was created. This gave factual evidence to the life of Red Cloud and helped give more information about his early and middle age.

“June 9, 1870: Chief Red Cloud meets with Ulysses S. Grant at the White House”

*TheDailyDose.com*.9 June 2016. Web. 17 October 2018*.*

This source was a quote directly from Red Cloud. This helped show how he felt after America kept pushing his people back to new reservations. It gave primary evidence of what he thought had happened after the Treaty of 1868.

McCaig, Donald. “The Bozeman Trail.” *SmithsonianMagazine.com*. 30 September 2000. Web.

18 October 2018.

This article gave a brief summary of Red Cloud’s War. It helped by aiding my research into the first conference between the Americans and Red Cloud and was used to quote the badly timed move that prevented the possibility of peace.

Ostlind, Emilene. “Red Cloud’s War.” *WyoHIstory.org.* 8 November 2014. Web. 6 October

2018.

This source was a brief overview of Red Cloud’s War. It provided events during the war and was used to look further into the major events.

“Red Cloud.” *Biography.com.* Web. 9 October 2018.

This source gave a summary of his life and the war. It helped elaborate on his early life and the wars, giving more input on the Fetterman Massacre and other major points.

“Red Cloud.” *UnitedStatesHistory.com.* Web. 2018 October 4.

This article was about the whole of Red Cloud’s life. It gave information about his earlier years up to his fight for Indian rights in 1880.

*Red Cloud’s War: The History and Legacy of the Only 19th Century War Won by the Native*

*Americans Against the United States.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Charles River Editors, 2016.

This book was a factual account of Red Cloud's War. This helped by giving in-depth sources and information on the war and was used to give evidence on the Fetterman and Wagon Box Fight.

Rzeczkowski, Frank “The Crow Indians and the Bozeman Trail.” *Montana.gov.* Web. 24

October 2018.

This is the Bozeman Trail from the perspective of the Crow Indians, a relatively peaceful Native group that was constantly raided by violent Sioux. This helped in finding out how the whole thing started with John Bozeman getting killed by two Natives disguised as peaceful Crow.

“The Fetterman Fight.” *ExploringOfftheBeatenPath.html.* Web. 22 October 2018.

This article gave and in detail description of the events that took place during the Fetterman Massacre. It was for the description of what the Indians did to the bodies after the fight took place.

Woods, Brett F. “Red Cloud’s War.” *AmericanHistory.com,* 2018. Web. 3 October 2018.

This source gave particular information on Red Cloud’s War. It helped show what happened in the Wagon Box Fight and in the Hayfield Fight during the war.