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

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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.

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