

THESIS

STRATEGIES OF THE ARAPAHOS AND CHEYENNES FOR COMBATING  
NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN COLONIALISM

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY STEPHEN HILGER ENTITLED [STRATEGIES OF THE ARAPAHOS AND CHEYENNES FOR COMBATING NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN COLONIALISM] BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF HISTORY.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

STRATEGIES OF THE ARAPAHOS AND CHEYENNES FOR COMBATING  
NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN COLONIALISM

The nineteenth century was a period of turbulence for the Cheyenne and Arapaho people and both tribes relied on existing cultural systems of socio-political organization to confront the new challenges brought by this new era of change. At the dawn of the century, the two tribes elected to embrace the horse and a nomadic equestrian lifestyle on the Great Plains. Although the adoption of the horse offered a path to acquire great wealth, the animal's ascendance as the critical material good within both societies stressed existing social relationships. The second new phenomenon confronting the Cheyennes and the Arapahos during the nineteenth century was the influx of American settlers onto the Front Range following the Colorado gold rush. American settlers not only brought a contending ecological relationship with the natural environment, but also competing conceptions of property and power. These new dynamics threatened the viability of equestrian lifestyles as natural resources were put under high levels of stress and became privatized by the new boundaries of capitalism.

To confront the challenges brought by the horse and American expansion, the Cheyennes and Arapahos developed indigenous political strategies expressed through their respective socio-political institutions. In Arapaho culture, males were progressively organized into peer groups through the lodge system. The lodge system directed Arapahos' interactions with foreign actors, as the tribe utilized intermediaries to relay pre-established



political decisions made by the tribe's elders known as the Water Pouring Men, functioning to avert instances of violence with the United States and limit tribal factionalism.

Similarly, the Cheyennes own socio-political institutions, the Council of Forty Four and the warrior societies, directed their relationship with United States in a different historical trajectory. While the chiefs of the Council of Forty Four strived to use peace and diplomacy in solving critical political issues, the warrior societies preferred methods of violence to advance Cheyenne interests. After the violent massacres of Cheyennes at Sand Creek and along the Washita River, however, a new generation of Cheyenne council chiefs, who embraced policies of both war and peace rose to leadership and were more successful in achieving Cheyenne political goals.

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## Introduction

The nineteenth century was a period of turbulence for both the Cheyenne and Arapaho people, and both tribes relied on existing systems of socio-political organization to respond to the new challenges confronting them. Beginning as semi-nomadic agriculturalists living in dispersed villages along the waterways of the Middle Missouri River Valley, both tribes progressively migrated onto the Great Plains and adopted an equestrian lifestyle in the late eighteenth century. Living along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in the nineteenth century, the Arapahos and Cheyennes engaged in an economically enticing but dangerous lifestyle as equestrian peoples, sometimes competing with rival tribes over access to the bison herds and the indigenous trading network spanning the American Southwest. To answer to this new world of conflict, the Arapahos and Cheyennes entered into a closely-knit alliance to collectively insure their security as equestrian peoples on the Great Plains. The next transition in Arapaho and Cheyenne nineteenth century life began with the introduction of American settlers onto the Front Range. After the mineral rushes to California, the Rocky Mountains, and the Black Hills, the two peoples would find themselves intermeshed with American settlers, beginning their colonial relationship with the United States.

In *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978: Symbols of Crises of Authority*, Loretta Fowler demonstrated how Arapaho culture, centered on the lodge system and creation of peer groups, directed the tribe's interactions with American colonizers from the time of contact with fur traders through their relocation to the Wind River Reservation. Fowler argues that

the Arapahos' nineteenth century political strategies originated in the system of ethics built into the lodge system, which emphasized and fostered social relationships across generational lines and strove to make important decisions by consensus, limiting factionalism within the tribe. Fowler concludes *Arapahoe Politics* with an appeal for further investigation "of political reorganization among the age-grade tribes and the ways these societies differed politically from those that lacked."<sup>1</sup> This thesis heeds Fowler's call for further research regarding the role of tribes' culture in the formation of political approaches and investigates the influence of the Arapahos and Cheyennes' indigenous systems of socio-political organization and own cultural values in shaping interactions with their colonizer, the United States of America. While the Arapahos and Cheyennes shared many similarities as they entered into a close nit alliance, both maintained distinct cultures and systems of social-political organization shaping their nineteenth century experience.

In Arapaho culture, males were progressively organized into peer groups through the lodge system and relied on the elders to acquire the knowledge needed to advance further in life. The lodge system also directed Arapahos' interaction with foreign actors, as the tribe utilized intermediaries to relay pre-established political decisions made by consensus by the tribe's elders known as the Water Pouring Men.

Similarly, the Cheyennes' own socio-political institutions, the Council of Forty Four and the warrior societies, directed their relationship with the United States on a different and more violent trajectory than the Arapahos. While the chiefs of the Council of Forty Four used peace and diplomacy in solving critical political issues, the warrior societies preferred methods of violence to advance Cheyenne interests. After the violent massacres of

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<sup>1</sup> Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics 1851-1978: Symbols of Crisis and Authority* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 299.

Cheyenne civilization populations at Sand Creek and along the Washita River, however, the Cheyennes reorganized their political institutions to account for the growing violence. After the massacres, a new generation of Cheyenne council chiefs, who embraced policies of both war and peace to secure their band's interest rose to leadership, increasing their political flexibility when confronting American agents.

To understand the critical role that indigenous political philosophies and systems of socio-political organization played in the articulation of Native relations with the United States, this thesis seeks to uncover how the Arapahos and Cheyennes responded to two social upheavals in the nineteenth century: the adoption of an equestrian culture, and increased contact with American settlers and their competing systems of property and power.<sup>2</sup> Prior to extensive contact with American settlers, the societies of the Cheyennes and Arapahos experienced a dramatic revolution as the two peoples elected to embrace the horse and take up a nomadic equestrian lifestyle on the Great Plains. Raided from the pens of Spanish Conquistadores and diffused across the Great Plains through the channels of the indigenous trading network, the horse offered a system of economic production for Native peoples, nomadic equestrianism.

Although the adoption of the horse offered a path to acquire great wealth for the Arapahos and Cheyennes, the animal's ascendance as the critical material good within both societies challenged and stressed existing social relationships. The acquisition of the horse steeped the Arapahos and Cheyennes into levels of violence previously unknown by the two peoples, as the raiding of horses between tribes proliferated across the Great Plains, often ending in instances of fatal conflict. These instances of tribal warfare quickly evolved into

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<sup>2</sup> Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1864* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-2; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

contentious domestic issues, as the tribal elders and the younger members of the warrior societies often disagreed over the need to enter into warfare for the acquisitions of horses.

The second cultural transformation experienced by the Arapahos and Cheyennes in the nineteenth century came as a result of the influx of American settlers onto the Front Range following the California, Colorado and Black Hills mineral rushes. The Arapahos and Cheyennes' relationship with this new population on the Front Range would be a difficult and tenuous one and ended in the colonialization of both peoples. The critical force behind the conflict between the two peoples stems from the discord of their respective conceptions of property and power. American understandings of property imposed both economic and ecological consequences onto the economic and social systems of the Cheyennes and Arapahos, as the concept of "inalienable" rights to private property ownership created new boundaries that the equestrian economic system of the Arapahos and Cheyennes often transgressed. And when these new boundaries of capitalism and power were crossed, instances of conflict between the two tribes and the United States often ensued.

Although steeped in Western Civilization's desire to rehabilitate the individual into assimilating into the United States and its structures of power through discipline rather than force, the American Army treated resisting populations of American Indians in a total war fashion to induce compliance with American desires for capitalist expansion. For the Cheyennes and Arapahos, then, American structures of power were not simply economic decisions enticing dependency on the market, it also presented a threat to their own lives, as American foreign policy authoritatively deemed all Indians of a particular tribe "hostile"



when an instance of violence was incurred against an American settler, justifying brutal assaults against an entire tribe of Plains Indians rather than only the individuals responsible.<sup>3</sup>

The first chapter, "The Pull of the Great Plains," retraces the Arapahos' and Cheyennes' decision to embrace an equestrian horse culture in the waning years of the eighteenth century. Pushed west by the spread of diseases and indigenous displacement caused by European settlement of the Atlantic coast, both peoples found themselves living along the rivers of the Dakotas during the eighteenth century. There, the two peoples were confronted with the decision to embrace equestrian nomadism, a new way of life offered by the introduction of the horse to the Great Plains. While other residents of the Middle Missouri such as the Mandans and Hidatsas elected to retain their semi-nomadic seasonal lifestyle, for the Chyennes and Arapahos, the opportunities of trade and access to copious populations of wild game were too advantageous to pass up, and they elected to embrace the horse and the new equestrian nomadic lifestyle the animal offered.

The second and third chapters present case studies of the Arapahos' and Cheyennes' socio-political responses to the acquisition of the horse and the arrival of American settlers during the nineteenth century. "To Walk a New Road" evidences the continuance of relationships and roles supported by the Arapaho lodge system and a proclivity to adopt new technologies and ideas to confront new political problems. In interactions with foreign actors, Arapahos continued to rely on intermediaries to relay pre-established political decisions formed by esteemed tribal elders. This unique political strategy fostered by the culture of the lodge system served to limit violence with the United States, as elders strived to take into account the wellbeing of all members of tribe. Intermediaries also played a

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald Dale Karr, "'Why Should You Be So Furious?': The Violence of the Pequot War," *The Journal of American History* 85.2 (Dec., 1998): 882-83.

critical role in achieving Arapaho interests through manipulating American expectations of their own role as “chief,” and sought out helpful technologies and ideas to formulate a future for the Arapaho people during this difficult period of colonialization.

The assimilation of the horse proved to be a far more difficult task for the Cheyennes than the Arapahos, as the warrior societies and council chiefs often disagreed over the need to form war parties to acquire the animal. While the young warriors needed horses to establish their own prominence in the tribe, council chiefs looked to avert war with neighboring tribes, leading to a discord in their foreign policy. The political conflict between the two institutions became even more problematic after the arrival of American settlers, as Western structures of power extracted revenge on all members of a tribe, rather than only the warrior society that committed the crime, resulting in the massacres of Cheyenne civilians at Sand Creek and along the Washita River. This new development forced the Cheyennes to reformulate the role of the council chief, and this is explored in detail in the third chapter, “Some man might be at the same time both a Warrior Chief and a Tribal Big Chief.”

Finally, while writing this socio-political history of the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples, I’ve attempted to keep in consideration the ethical issues concerning Western research of indigenous peoples, particularly the adverse impact representations produced by academic scholarship have had on the lives of contemporary American Indians. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasized that Western academics must take into consideration the effects their research imposes upon the people they seek to understand. Indigenous cultures hold their own unique conceptions of space, gender, time and identity, and when academics compartmentalize foreign cultures according to Western value systems, distorted, and even racist depictions of indigenous

cultures can be produced, an act defined by Tuhiwai Smith as cultural imperialism. This act of cultural imperialism impresses damaging repercussions onto indigenous communities. When Western research creates a distorting depiction of indigenous cultures that becomes validated by the powerful, Native peoples own interpretations of their cultures are silenced and deemed unimportant and wrong, furthering Western colonial ambitions seeking to attack and control their culture.<sup>4</sup> As an outsider, I do not possess either the experience or worldview to fully understand the intricacies of the cultures of the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples. In the pages that follow, there are inevitably errors in my analysis and representation of the histories of the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples. As such, I urge the reader to be cognizant of the limitations of my approach and worldview in this attempt to reconstruct these two peoples' nineteenth century experiences.

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, Ltd., 1999), 47-49.

## Chapter I

### “The Pull of the Nineteenth Century Great Plains.” The Cheyennes’ and Arapahos’ Choice to Adopt Nomadic Equestrian Cultures

Contemporaneous with the Lewis and Clark Expedition embarking on their return journey after reaching the shores of the Pacific, a second, Discovery Corps Expedition under the command of Zebulon Pike embarked from Fort Bellefontaine on July 15, 1806. The Pike expedition was assigned to map the poorly documented southern lands of Louisiana Territory. The Pike Expedition, however, did not accomplish their ambitious goals of cartography, for on February 26, 1807, suspicious Spanish forces arrested the party for espionage. While Pike’s failed to achieve the same notoriety of his contemporaries Lewis and Clark, Pike’s descriptions of the natural environment of the interior of the United States have left a lasting influence on later Euro-American perceptions on the natural environment of the Great Plains. He described the terrain as “a barren soil, parched and dried up for eight months in the year, [that] presents neither moisture nor nutriment sufficient for the growth of wood.” Without the nutrients to foster the growth of hardwood forests, he doubted the economic value of the American Southwest, and instead viewed the landmass as a barrier to American Progress. As he remarked, “These vast plains of the western hemisphere may become in time equally celebrated with the sandy deserts of Africa.”<sup>5</sup> This

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<sup>5</sup> Zebulon Montgomery Pike, *Exploratory Travels through the Western Territories of North America* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orem, and Brown: 1811), 245.

analogy to the sands of the Sahara became a prominent motif utilized by American pioneers to express their relationship with this foreign terrain, evolving into the mythical representation of the Great Plains as the “Great American Desert.”

This Great American Desert was not simply devoid of the natural resources and moisture necessary to “civilized” sedentary systems of agriculture, it was also a geography whose vastness seemed to flabbergast the Euro-American mind. Seemingly a mere glimpse of infinite expanse of grasses and sky stirred the souls of American pioneers, creating an unsettling of their identity. The recollections of 1870s buffalo hunter Billy Dixon attest to this disparaging effect the plains produced on the American pioneer psyche:

There is something beyond description that clutches a man’s heart and imagination in the Plains country. Whether it is the long sweep of the horizon, with its suggestion of infinity, touching upon melancholy, or that wide-arching expanse of sky, glittering by night and glorious by day, may not be determined, yet no man is ever quite his former self after he has felt deeply the bigness, the silence and the mystery of that region.<sup>6</sup>

For Rufus Sage in 1840, it was a combination of both the ecological and metaphysical disparity of the American Desert that fostered an unsettling in his mind, poetically lamenting:

*Nor grateful shade, of spreading tree,*

*Invite my feet to rest;*

*Nor cooling stream, in melody,*

*Attempts my quicken’d zest.*

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<sup>6</sup> Billy Dixon and Frederick Samuel Barde, *Life and Adventures of “Billy” Dixon, of Adobe Walls, Texas Panhandle* (Gunthrie, Oklahoma: Co-Operative Publishing Co, 1914), 14-15.

*So dismal all! Why should I stay*

*And sicken by their view?*

*Thrice gladly will I turn away,*

*And bid these scenes adieu!*

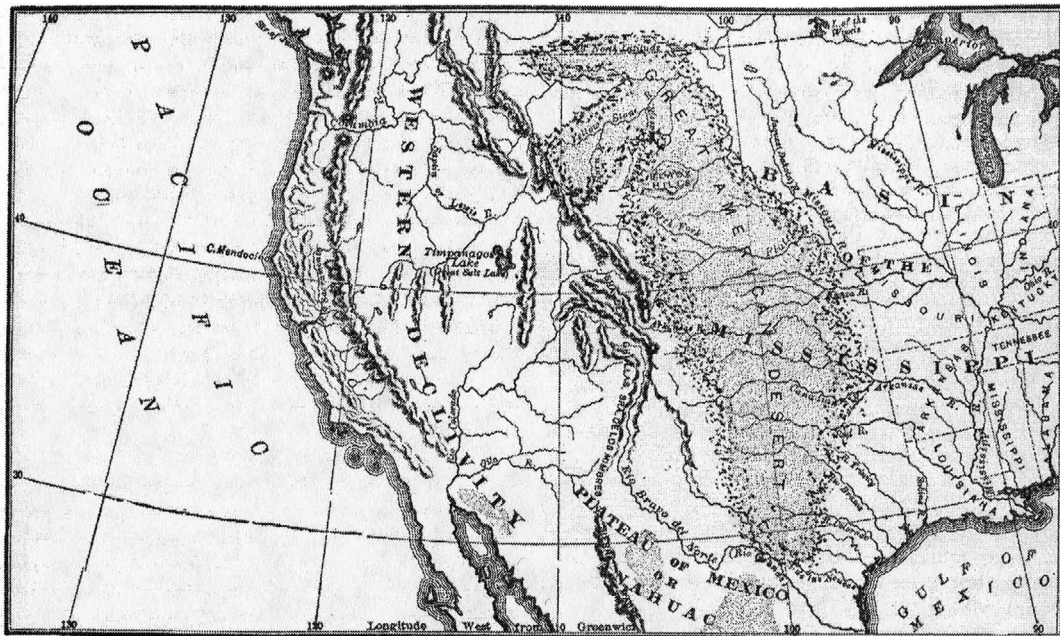


Figure 1.1 Old Map of the Great American Desert.<sup>8</sup>

Pejorative imagery that identifies the Great Plains as a locale desolate in both ecology and metaphysical meaning has perpetuated the myth of the region as the Great American Desert, unfit for agriculture and thus civilization. This myth has been projected onto the region's Native inhabitants, who at the beginning of extensive American contact, embraced

<sup>7</sup> Rufus Sage, *Rufus Sage, His Letters and Papers 1836-1847...*, Leroy and Ann Hafen eds. (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1957), 313.

<sup>8</sup> "Old Map of the Great American Desert," Courtesy of in Alexander Bixby, *History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valleys* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1880), 165.

equestrian horse cultures. Equestrian nomadism was naturally perceived by American settlers as a reflection of the desolate and barbaric qualities of the Great American Desert itself, leading to the labeling of Native equestrian cultures as “primitive” and “uncivilized.”

When the deprecatory insinuations describing the Great Plains as an area of desolation are cast away, however, the area’s ecological and economic uniqueness rises to the surface. This chapter elucidates the dramatic demographic and economic shift undertaken by the Arapaho and Cheyenne peoples during the late eighteenth century as they migrated from the river valleys of the Middle Missouri onto the Great Plains. The unique ecological diversity of the Great Plains, with its distribution of grasses, waterways and forests, fostered the development of complicated horse cultures and nomadic modes of economic production unique to the American experience. The domestication of the horse allowed Native peoples to tap directly into the carbohydrates and proteins produced through photosynthesis of the grasslands of the Great Plains. With the grasslands fueling an equestrian life, the mobility of the Cheyennes and Arapahos expanded exponentially, granting access to new economic opportunities, such as participation in the continental horse and rifle trade, access to bison herds, and the increased profitability of raiding on horseback. For eighteenth century Arapahos and Cheyennes, the Great Plains was far from an “American Desert.” Rather, Arapaho and Cheyenne bands made a consciously elected to adopt an equestrian culture and migrate onto the Great Plains in order to maximize their access to critical natural resources and economic opportunities.

By retracing the migrations of Cheyenne and Arapaho bands to the Great Plains, this chapter seeks to dismantle the pejorative connotation associated with the economic system of equestrian nomadism. To advance their security and economic and biological wellbeing, bands of the Cheyennes and Arapahos deliberately elected to revolutionize their

culture and economic relationship with the natural environment, leaving behind their semi-nomadic lifestyle in the Upper Missouri River Valley. The adoption of the nomadic horse culture by the Arapaho and Cheyenne peoples was the most effective and efficient lifestyle choice available for the two peoples at the dawn of an increasingly violent and deadly nineteenth century.

# I

Tracing the migration of the Arapaho and Cheyenne peoples from their times on the Middle Missouri has proven to be an arduous task, as both peoples lacked a distinct material culture. Without a clearly discernable Arapaho pottery tradition or a Cheyenne arrowhead style to trace, it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish the ethnicity of a site's former inhabitants, as the indigenous peoples of the Middle Missouri shared a common material culture.

According to Cheyenne George Bent, son of famous trader and pioneer William Bent and Cheyenne Owl Woman, his ancestors previously lived on the shores of the Great Lakes as early as 1600. There, the Cheyenne primarily relied on fish for sustenance and lived on the shores of the Great Lakes year round. Cheyenne elders classify their time on the shores of the Great Lakes, as destitute period in Cheyenne history, naming it "the time before the Cheyenne possessed the Bow and Arrow." Finally in the early seventeenth century, the Cheyenne's ancestors left their waterside residence and immigrated west into present day Minnesota.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> George Hyde, *Life of George Bent, Written from his Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 4.



There is little record of the Arapaho peoples prior to the early nineteenth century. Oral history suggests the Arapaho lived in Minnesota and immigrated into the Missouri River Valley in the 1700s. With the Mandan and Hidatsa as neighbors, the Arapahos maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle hunting bison and other game, as well as raising maize and other vegetables in the spring and summer months. Cheyenne testament adds credence to the notion that the Arapaho lived near the Mandans and Hidatsas for some time. George Bent, the son of the infamous trader and Colorado pioneer William Bent and Cheyenne Owl Women, affirmed that when the Cheyenne arrived in the Missouri River Valley, the Arapahos were already engaged in trade with Arikara and Mandan villages.<sup>10</sup>

The second, and more perplexing problem in retracing the Arapahos and Cheyennes' migration onto the Great Plains is that the tribal units of social organization existing in the nineteenth century were undeveloped in the centuries prior. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Native America underwent a dramatic period of stress as foreign diseases and demographic pressures from American colonization of the Atlantic coast imposed devastating consequences onto Native communities. With smallpox, influenza, typhoid fever, and the measles exploding into pandemic proportions, established indigenous systems of social organization and cultural knowledge were lost during this tragic period of demographic decline. Thankfully, this period of destruction was also marked by great creation, as a dramatic reformation of social identities and relationships flourished as Native people collectively reorganized their lives in areas of cultural genesis such as the *pays de haut*, the "Hill-Country" of the Carolinas, and for the Arapahos and Cheyennes, the

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<sup>10</sup> "George Bent to George Hyde," August 3, 1913, George Bent Papers, WH1704, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

Middle Missouri River Valley.<sup>11</sup> During this critical period of cultural creation, the ancestral bands of the Cheyenne and Arapaho converged together in the river valleys of the Middle Missouri, creating larger tribal identities to assist in confronting the new economic and socio-political challenges in their dramatically changing world.

According to Alfred Kroeber, the Arapahos are comprised of five bands, the *nowoo3inebeino* 'southern people,' *hobo'nooxowuunenno* 'rock ledge men,' *hino'eino* 'Our People' or Arapaho proper, *beesowuunenno* 'wood lodge men', and *hitouunenno* the Gros Venture.<sup>12</sup> During their time in the Middle Missouri, the five branches united together, forming a military defense but retaining their autonomy to live as separate bands. With time all of the bands except the Gros Venture were absorbed into *hino'eino* or Arapaho proper. The Gros Ventre elected to form their own tribe, and according Father Pierre Jon de Smet, one of the first Jesuit Black Robes to the Middle Missouri, the Gros Ventre separated from the other four Arapaho bands in the early decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

Mirroring the Arapahos' formation of a tribal identity, the Cheyenne people began to emerge as a tribal unit at some point during the middle eighteenth century, when the *Tsé-tsébéstâhese* or *Tsitsistas* encountered a band of distance relatives, known as the *Só'taa'e*, or *Suhtaio*. The first interaction between the *Tsitsistas* and *Suhtaio* nearly ended in conflict rather than conciliation. Reiterating Cheyenne oral history, George Bent maintained, "When the

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<sup>11</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Kroeber, "The Arapaho," *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol., XVIII (1902), 6-7; Jeffrey Anderson, *The Four Hills of Life, Northern Arapaho Knowledge and Life Movement* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Jean De Smet, *Western Missions and Missionaries: A Series of Letters* (New York: James B. Kirker, 1863), 256.

Cheyennes and *Suhtaio* first met, both tribes lined up and prepared to fight, both sides shouting, but before the battle began the Cheyennes discovered that the *Suhtais* spoke a dialect of the Cheyenne tongue.” Common linguistics was not the only cultural trait the two peoples shared, as their cosmologies and religious symbols were also strikingly similar. While the *Tsitsistas* possessed the Sweet Medicine Arrows known as the *Maahotse*, bestowed to them by their revered prophet Sweet Medicine, similarly, the *Suhtaio* revered *Issi wun*, the Sacred Buffalo Hat, imparted to their people from the cultural prophet Erect Horns. Both Sweet Medicine and Erect Horns brought sacred gifts from the creator securing their new lives as buffalo hunters on the Great Plains. Not surprisingly, the two peoples’ religious leaders, the Sweet Medicine Chief and the Keeper of the Buffalo Hat, quickly became friends. That night, the Keeper of the Buffalo Hat’s band of *Suhtaio* moved their camp adjacent to the *Tsitsistas*, beginning the two peoples’ lives as a the Cheyenne people. The *Suhtaio* appear to have introduced the *Tsitsistas* to many practices necessary for equestrian life on the Great Plains. Bent recalled, “These people were buffalo hunters who did not plant corn or live in permanent villages, but kept moving about in skin lodges, following the buffalo.” The *Suhtaio* continued to live in separate encampments adjacent to the *Tsitsistas* up to 1830.<sup>14</sup>

Ethnologist James Mooney argued the prime catalyst behind the Western migration of the Cheyenne was “the increasing pressure from the Cree and other tribes of the northwest after the establishment of the English trading posts on Hudson bay.”<sup>15</sup> English and French traders in the Great Lakes region introduced firearms into the Great Lakes

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<sup>14</sup> George Hyde, *Life of George Bent, Written from his Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 14.

<sup>15</sup> James Mooney, Rodolphe Charles Petter, and Rudolphe Petter, *The Cheyenne Indians* (Cambridge: American Anthropological Association, 1905), 364.

region, and Crees and Assiniboines were the first to put use this new technological advantage. With the diaspora of American Indians from the East Coast and Ohio River Valley flocking into the forests and lakes of the Great Lakes region, firearms allowed the Assiniboine and Cree people to effectively fend off the new arrivals from overtaking their coveted hunting grounds and wild rice paddies. Their firearm monopoly would not last long, for when French traders expanded their trading enterprises further inland, the Lakota bands living in northern Minnesota gained access to firearms. With this new technology in hand, the Lakotas asserted their control over the lakes and forests of Minnesota abounding in whitetail deer and wild rice. The Cheyennes and Arapahos were in a precarious situation. Living in Western Minnesota, they could not access the European trading posts and the firearms they afforded. Without access to firearms, the Cheyenne and Arapahos were at the mercy of the Lakota warriors and were pushed west into the river valleys of the Missouri, Red, and Sheyenne Rivers of the Dakotas.<sup>16</sup>

The Biesterfeldt site, located along a former channel of the Red River in the modern city Lisbon, North Dakota, is the most well documented Cheyenne anthropological residence. Cheyenne oral history remembers the Biesterfeldt village is remembered by a story of a war party leaving the village and viewing the awesome spectacle of a solar eclipse. Comparing the story with a calendar of known solar eclipses dates the village to the year 1724. The village was destroyed by a Lakota war party no later than 1790.<sup>17</sup> Biesterfeldt contains thirty-seven house depressions, closely knitted together in a village pattern common across the Middle Missouri, as well as fifteen outdoor storage pits. Seven ditches, ranging in

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<sup>16</sup> Richard White, "The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of American History*, 65.2 (September 1978): 321-322.

<sup>17</sup> John H Moore, *The Cheyenne* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 23.

length and width with the largest measuring sixteen meters in length and one and a half meters wide, surround the encampment at its vital points of weakness. All of these developments attest to the need for defense and fortification of the village against invading war parties.<sup>18</sup>

The site includes artifacts of the two technologies essential for a horse culture, the horse and the gun. In one particular storage pit, the remains of a nonfunctional gun, what are believed to be five aboriginal gunflints, and bones of a horse were uncovered. Radiocarbon dating of the bones suggests that as early as the 1750s, the Cheyenne began their acquisition and domestication of the animal for the new life on the Great Plains.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Wood, *Biesterfeldt: A Post-Contact Coalescent Site on the Northeastern Plains* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-44.

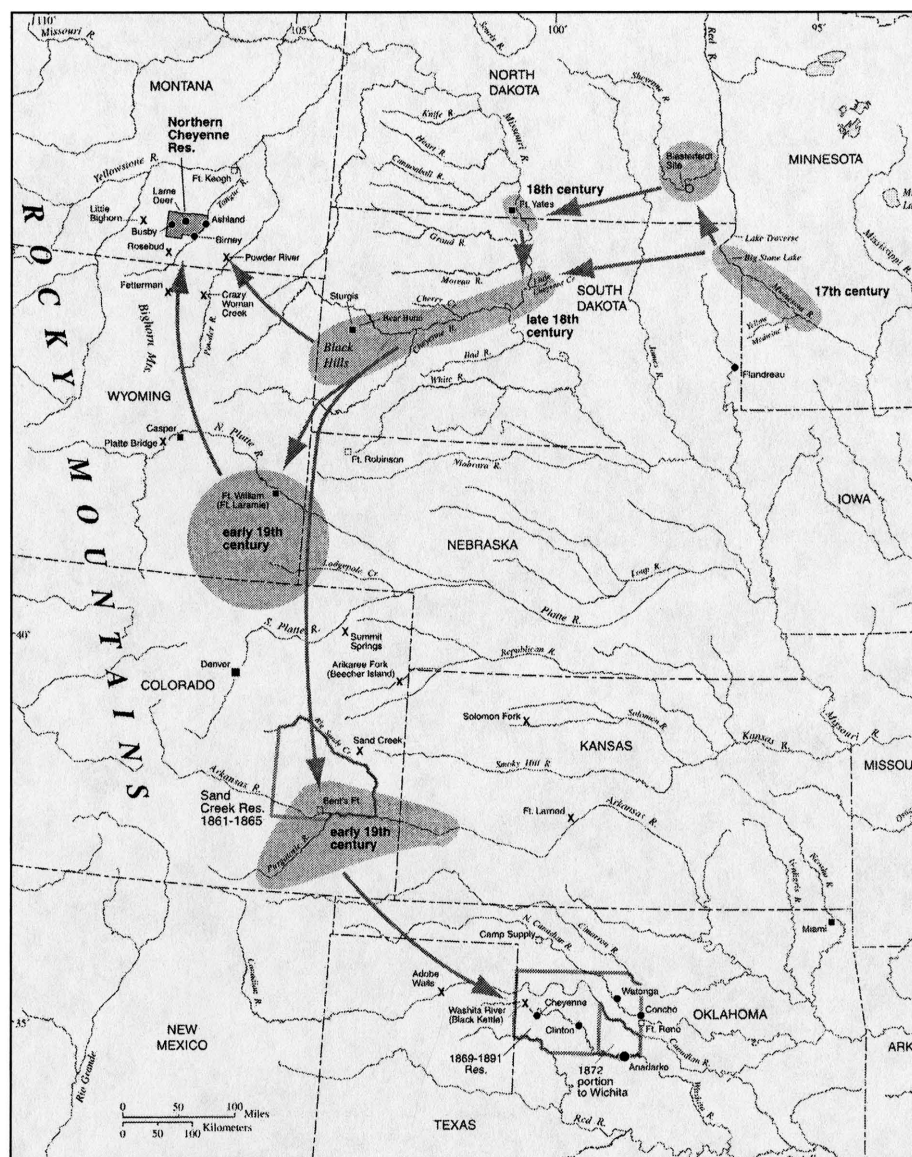


Figure 1.2 Map of Cheyenne Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Migrations<sup>20</sup>

A Lakota band took credit for the destruction of the Cheyenne village at Biesterfeldt. In a trade interaction with a Lakota hunting party in the spring of 1798, David Thomson inquired of the warrior Chief Sheshepaskut why the Lakota decided to destroy the Cheyenne

<sup>20</sup> "Map of Cheyenne Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Migrations," Courtesy of *Handbook of North American Indians*, Raymond DeMallie and William C. Sturtevant eds., vol. 13.2, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991).

village. Chief Sheshepaskut responded, "Our people and the Cheyennes for several years had been doubtful friends," but as they produced "Corn and other Vegetables, which we had not and of which we were fond, we traded with them, we passed over and forgot many things we did not like." Lakota attitudes changed "when some of our people went to trade Corn, and while there, saw a Cheyenne Hunter bring in a fresh Scalp." A Lakota hunting party had recently gone missing after entering into the vicinity of Biesterfeldt. Suspiciously, the Lakotas assumed the scalp to be the last remains of one of their missing kin and subsequently organized a war party against the Cheyenne village the following summer when the "Bulls were fat." One afternoon after the Cheyenne men left the village to hunt, the Lakota war plan sprung into action. Sheshepaskut recalled, "We entered the Village and put everyone to death except three Women; after taking everything we wanted we quickly set fire to the Village and with haste retreated for those that fled at our attack would soon bring back."<sup>21</sup>

## II

Despite the destruction of the Cheyenne village of Biesterfeldt, the Arapahos and Cheyennes did not simply move onto the Great Plains because of the threat posed by expanding Lakota military force. Like all human beings, the bands of the Cheyenne and Arapaho possessed a choice, where immigrating onto the Great Plains was deliberated to be the best possible option. The tribes living along the Middle Missouri arrived at different conclusions, as the Mandans, Hidatsas and Arickaras conditioned by generations of

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<sup>21</sup> J. B. Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America; 1784-1812* (Toronto: the Champlain Society, 1916), 259-262.

sedentary life, elected to maintain their horticultural lifestyle. Ultimately, for the Arapahos and Cheyennes, the opportunities presented by an equestrian horse culture outweighed its risks.<sup>22</sup>

The bands of the Arapaho and Cheyenne could have elected to maintain their semi-nomadic lifestyle on the banks of the Missouri, Sheyenne and Red Rivers. Through the lens of the optimal foraging theory, agriculture offered advantages by eliminating the need to invest time in seeking out the location of foodstuffs. Agriculture, however, imposed costs of its own, as it required extensive investments of labor to maintain. Time investments also increased the longer a field was utilized for agriculture, as the drained nutrients limited crop yields, diminishing the efficacy of their labor. To remediate agricultural investment costs, American Indians implemented a gendered division of labor with women maintaining the agricultural fields and men hunting wild game. This unique division of labor provided an ideal diet of essential proteins and carbohydrates from a balanced diet of venison, beans, squash, and other assorted vegetables.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the advantages of a gendered division of labor, farming imposed its own drawbacks that trumped questions of time and labor efficiency. Evidenced by the fortifications and subsequent siege of Biesterfeldt, sedentary village life was extremely vulnerable to raiding, warfare and violence. Without reliable access to firearms and confined within the close quarters of village life, villagers were vulnerable to mounted adversaries yielding rifles who could easily raid and devastate the village communities of the Middle Missouri. Military foes were not the largest drawback to remaining living a semi-nomadic

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<sup>22</sup> Elliot West, *The Contested Plains*, 54-57.

<sup>23</sup>William F. Keegan, "The Optimal Foraging Analysis of Horticultural Production," *American Anthropologist*, 88.1 (Mar., 1986): 102-104.



lifestyle in the Middle Missouri, as village life was very susceptible to the most deadly threat in American Indian life, European epidemics. The Cheyennes' and Arapahos' first concern in deciding to immigrate to the Great Plains, then, was their own survival, as sedentary village life in Middle Missouri increased the likelihood of contact with deadly European diseases and attacks by mounted adversaries.<sup>24</sup>

While the dangers associated with the semi-nomadic lifestyle continued to grow, the Great Plains beckoned as a land of new opportunity. In the precontact era, the Great Plains bustled with an extensive commerce of ideas and goods between the years of 1300-1650, evidenced by an anthropological processing site uncovered in Tom Green County, Texas. Radiocarbon dating suggests the site has been inhabited since 1300 BC, and over 922 bison bones and 56 end-scrapers, a tool used primarily for processing animal furs, have been unearthed. With the assistance of radio carbon dating, a positive correlation between the increase in bison bones and end-scrapers at the site's encampments was discovered. 93% of the bison bones and 29 of the 56 end-scrapers uncovered at the site dating back to 1300-1650 AD, attesting to the dramatic increase in the trade of Bison robes in the precontact area. Even before the introduction of the horse and the rifle, the precontact trading work was on the upswing, and beacons Native societies to participate in its commerce.

The proliferation of precontact trade is confirmed by the testimony of early Spanish explorers. In 1537, Marcos de Niza embarked to explore northern New Mexico and its fabled gold lined pueblo cities. During his thirty day trek to the pueblo of *Cibola*, de Niza was astonished by the great distances Native Americans traveled to acquire goods. In response to his inquiry, accompanying Native Americans stated, "they went to get turquoises

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<sup>24</sup> Michael K. Trimble, "Infectious Disease and the Northern Plains Horticulturalists: A Human Behavior Model," *Plains Anthropologist*, 34.124 Part 2 (May, 1989): 55-56.

and cow skins, besides other valuable things.” In one village stop during his expedition, the friar received a gift of buffalo skins “tanned and finished so well that he [de Niza] thought it was evidence that they had been prepared by men who were skilled in this work.”<sup>25</sup> De Niza’s interactions with Native Americans of the Southern Plains evidence that a complicated trade network with established protocol to acquire luxurious goods such as turquoise gems, as well as items essential for surviving harsh winters such as bison robes, was well established prior to European contact.

The stakes of the indigenous trading network were raised after the introduction of two new technologies brought by European Contact in the early decades of the seventeenth century, the horse and the rifle. The horse offered native communities a life of mobility and cut their traveling time in half. Combined with the rifle, the animal granted Native peoples the possibility of transforming into mobile fighting forces. The speed of the horse and the accuracy of the gun made the hunting of wild game more effective and efficient and warfare more prevalent. The horse dramatically increased the carrying capacities available to Native Americans. Prior to the introduction of the horse, Native peoples of the Great Plains harnessed dogs to a travois to carry their belongings. In general, a dog outfitted with a travois could carry eighty pounds. The potential carrying capacity of the horse towered over this figure. A horse’s back alone could carry two hundred pounds. Outfitted with a travois, the carrying capacity of the horse was increased by an additional three hundred pounds. With this added carrying capacities, Native Americans could exponentially expand the

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<sup>25</sup> George Parker Winship, Pedro de Castaneda de Nágera, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, and Antonio de Mendoza, Juan Jaramillo, *The Coronado Expedition; 1540-1542* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 357.

amount of bison robes, venison and trade goods they carried, working to increase their personal wealth and the profitability of harvesting bison.<sup>26</sup>

The most important value of the horse, however, was the access the animal granted to two forms of seemingly inexhaustible forms of energy on the Great Plains, grasses and bison. Prior to the domestication of the horse, natural game populations of bison predominantly benefited from the energy of the vast grasslands of the Great Plains. Now with the horse, American Indians directly utilized the energy of the grasslands, fueling their nomadic lifestyle.<sup>27</sup> With the horse, native peoples could easily follow the vast bison herds, capitalizing on this gargantuan source of energy and wealth. The kill of one adult bison procured an astounding two hundred and thirty five kilograms of venison, an amount far greater than that yielded by the next highest prey available, deer and big horn sheep, which yield a mere thirty-four kilograms of venison per adult kill. In addition to the massive quantity of venison retrieved from a bison kill, the venison also possessed the highest level of calories per kilogram, at 2,100 calories per kilogram, eclipsing the calorie yield of the venison of deer and big horn sheep by 200 calories. While the meat of other animals, such as rodents, packed a higher caloric, the sheer mass of the bison made it the most attractive resource in which to invest time and energy harvesting.<sup>28</sup>

Prior to acquiring the horse, the bison was not an easily accessible resource for the Cheyennes and Arapahos living in the Black Hills largely due to the often-unknown location of bison herds. Bison hunting was limited to the summer months, for in the winter the herds migrated south to the Arkansas River Valley. The horse drastically lowered the

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<sup>26</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Elliott West, *The Contested Plains*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Marcel Kornfeld, *Pull of the Hills: Affluent Foragers of the Western Black Hills* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1994), 99

investment costs of time in the pursuit of this nutritional beast. Riding on horseback Native hunters could easily locate and track down migrating bison herds in a fraction of time it previously took on foot. In addition, the larger carrying capacities offered by a horse outfitted with a travois increased the profitability ratio of the bison by allowing for the return of hundreds of additional pounds of venison to Native encampments. The Bison's venison was only one part of the bounty reaped by potential hunters in the nineteenth century. Native peoples could trade the venison and robes made from bison skins for an array of foodstuffs such as rice and beans to complement their diet, as well as a multitude of material goods such as firearms, metal cooking ware, beads and clothing from European traders.<sup>29</sup>

The die was cast for nomadic horse cultures to rise in prominence on the Great Plains. The introduction of the European technologies of the horse and the gun to the continent presented a new lifestyle opportunity of equestrian nomadism to Native communities. The Comanches were the first to capitalize on the new possibilities afforded by a nomadic equestrian lifestyle. The Comanches' first contact with the horse occurred in the Spanish colonies of New Mexico and New Spain in the early 1600s. Through trade and raiding of Spanish settlements particularly after the Pueblo Uprising of 1680, the Comanches acquired their own horse stocks and quickly integrated the animal into the existing precontact trade network.

The horse did far more than present an opportunity to increase carrying loads and travel speeds in the precontact trade network; it dramatically altered the nature of the trade itself. As eloquently articulated by George Bent, "Horses were to the Plains Indians what gold was to the whites, and when the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Gros Ventres and Blackfeet

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<sup>29</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 29.

moved south of the Platte their main object was to procure more horses.”<sup>30</sup> During the seventeenth century, the Comanches facilitated an intercontinental horse, firearm and buffalo robe trade in addition to other cultural exotica, centered from the Arkansas River Valley. The Comanches acquired horses from Spanish New Mexico and transported them to eagerly awaiting native populations and traders east and north of the Arkansas River Valley. In exchange for their horses, Comanches received firearms, buffalo robes, and manufactured goods. Finally, the trade circuit was completed when Comanches bartered their recently acquired buffalo robes and manufactured goods to Spanish traders in addition to raiding New Mexican settlements to replenish their horse stocks.<sup>31</sup>

The intercontinental horse and gun trade garnered the Comanches considerable wealth and their economic success did not go unnoticed. During the late eighteenth century neighboring tribes on the periphery of the Great Plains attempted to acquire their own piece of the flourishing continental horse and firearm trade. The Kiowas entered into the Arkansas River Valley from the north, presenting the first challenge to the Comanche monopoly east of the Rocky Mountains. After a brief conflict, the Comanches conceded to the Kiowas the right to establish themselves within the Arkansas River Valley and the right to participate in the continental horse and firearm trade.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> George Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indians Trade System,” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 29.4, (Winter, 1998): 503.

<sup>32</sup> Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850,” *The Journal of American History*, 78.2 (September, 1991): 473.

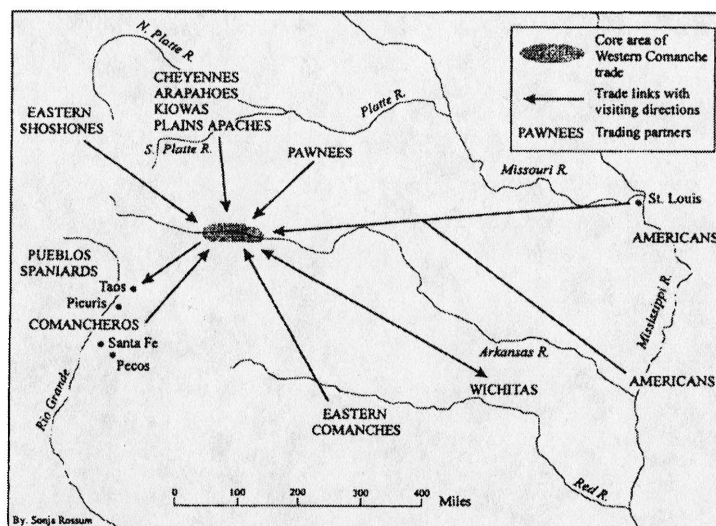


Figure 1.3 Map of the Western Comanche trade center in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries<sup>33</sup>

Seeking to emulate the economic success of the Comanches and Kiowas, the Arapaho and Cheyenne peoples jointly emigrated from the Dakotas to the Arkansas River Valley at the turn of the nineteenth century. In their southern descent, the Arapahos and Cheyennes moved into contested territory, which the Kiowas, Apaches, Pawnees, and Comanches all had a stake in. Immediately, the Arapahos and Cheyennes engaged in warfare against the Comanches and Kiowas. Conflict abounded between the Arapahos and Cheyennes and the Comanches, Apaches and Kiowas until 1840, when an intertribal peace was established.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Map of the Western Comanche trade center in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries," Courtesy of Sonja Rossum and Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center," 501.

<sup>34</sup> Elliott West, *The Way to the West; Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 17; Richard White, "The Winning of the West," 333.

## III

The choice for the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes to take up the horse and embark on a nomadic lifestyle was a rational and efficient choice considering the problems of warfare and disease proliferating in the Middle Missouri Valley. A statement by Plains Indian ethnographer James Mooney, although full of pejorative descriptions of what he deemed antiquated Native American methods of acquiring game and resources, alludes to the dramatic importance of the animal. To Mooney, these benefits were obvious:

It is unnecessary to dilate on the revolution made in the life of the Indian by the possession of the horse. Without it he was a half starved skulker in the timber, creeping up on foot toward the unwary deer or building a brush corral with infinite labor to surround a herd of antelope and seldom venturing more than a few days' journey from home. With the horse he was transformed into the daring buffalo hunter, able to procure in a single day enough food to supply his family for a year, leaving him free then to sweep the plains with his war parties along a range of a thousand miles.<sup>35</sup>

The horse remedied most of the pressing issues facing the Arapaho and Cheyenne peoples while they were situated on the Middle Missouri. For these people no longer living in sedentary villages, the nomadic lifestyle limited the casualties brought by epidemics. This is in stark contrast to the Mandans and Hidatsas, who elected to remain as horticulturalists living in sedentary villages along the Middle Missouri. The diary of Francis Chardon, a fur trader at Fort Clark on the upper Missouri River from 1834 to 1839, attested to the devastation inflicted by epidemics on the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara peoples. During a smallpox outbreak in 1837, Chardon cynically recollects, "8 or 10 die off daily, Thirty five Mandans have died, the Women and children I keep no account of." Euthanasia and suicide became common escapes from the pain and suffering induced by smallpox. On the

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<sup>35</sup> James Mooney, *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898) 161.

August 30, 1837, Chardon recorded the ghastly experience of a Mandan woman suffering from smallpox. The Mandan woman's husband sprang up and said to his wife, "When you were young, you were handsome, you are now ugly and going to leave me, but no, I will go with you." He then "took up his gun and shot her dead, and with his Knife ripped open his own belly." These were not the only lives to be voluntarily ended that day. Following the lead of the tragic couple, two young men also committed suicide to relieve themselves of the devastation inflicted by smallpox, as "One of them stabbed himself with a Knife and other with an arrow."<sup>36</sup> Although the Arapaho and Cheyenne suffered from epidemics on the Great Plains, their mobility limited their contact with European diseases. In constant motion and limiting their interactions with whites, the Cheyennes and Arapahos much more effectively held off the population decline that followed by deadly epidemics.

One of the benefits of their new nomadic lifestyle was the nutritious diet the Great Plains afforded. Bison venison, abounding in protein, composed the largest element in the Plains Indian diet. Other animals were consumed frequently as well, including elk, sheep and deer. While the nomadic lifestyle afforded no shortage of proteins, carbohydrates also were readily variable. A wide array of vegetative resources, including wild artichokes, wild onions, prickly pears, sunflowers, cherries, prairie turnips, gooseberries and buffalo berries could all be foraged in their new environment.<sup>37</sup>

By adopting an equestrian way of life, the Cheyennes and Arapahos effectively capitalized on the unique lifestyle opportunity afforded by the natural environment of the

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<sup>36</sup> Francis A Chardon and Annie Heloise Abel, *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark 1834-1839* (Pierre: South Dakota Dept. of History, 1932), 131-130.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph M. Prince and Richard H. Steckel, "Nutritional Success on the Great Plains: Nineteenth-Century Equestrian Nomads," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33.3 (Winter, 2003): 363.



Great Plains. Yet, the transition to an equestrian life would drastically alter the traditional lifestyles of the Arapaho and Cheyenne peoples. In one traditional Cheyenne story, *Ma'beo'o*, the Cheyenne creator god, warned priests of the new troubles that would arise on the Great Plains. "If you have horses everything will be changed for you forever," *Ma'beo'o* admonished. "You will have to move around a lot to find pasture for your horses. You will have to have fights with other tribes, who will want your pastureland or the places you hunt. Think before you decide."<sup>38</sup> *Ma'beo'o's* prophecy quickly proved accurate as violence with neighboring tribes proliferated on the Great Plains. Yet, for the generations dealing with the problem or either remaining semi-nomadic horticulturalists or embracing a nomadic way of life, by choosing the latter this generation of Arapahos and Cheyennes maximized their wellbeing economically, dietetically and militarily.

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<sup>38</sup> Pekka Hämmäläinen. "The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures," *Journal of American History*, 90 (2003): 840.

## Chapter II

### “To Walk a New Road.”

#### The Arapahos’ use of Technology in Confronting Nineteenth Century Political Dilemmas

The Arapaho oral history *Hinóno’íí Honoh’oe* or “the “Arapaho Boy,” retells of an event universally experienced by Plains Indians during the nineteenth century within the unique cultural contours of Arapaho culture, the pilfering of horse stocks by rival bands. The history begins with an Arapaho encampment awakening to find that under the cover of darkness, thieves had captured and rode away with a sizable number of their horses left grazing on the outskirts of their encampment. In the wake of this unpleasant discovery, seven young warriors mounted their fastest steeds, forming a war party to recover the band’s stolen animals and extract retribution against the bandits. Lost in the midst of this early morning chaos was a young Arapaho boy of meager means. Wishing to establish himself within Arapaho society through the performance of heroic deeds on the battlefield, the young boy yearned to join the war party’s recovery mission. Yet, the poor status of the boy’s family prevented the boy from possessing a horse of his own, a necessity for Arapaho warriors. To remedy this material deficiency, the young boy pursued a social course of action emblematic to Arapaho culture: the reliance on elders for societal advancement. He proceeded to request the assistance of his grandfather to provide him a white horse, a color signifying spiritual power. The boy’s grandfather enthusiastically responded, “I am going to ask the old men to come and smudge you, to bless you with medicines.” Emboldened with

the spiritual powers inherent in the elders' blessings, the boy was now impervious to death in the coming ordeal. As the elders exclaimed, "he's not going to get hurt. He will know what to do, because he asked for the white horse."<sup>39</sup> Outfitted with only the blessings and spiritual powers bestowed by his elders, the boy set off on foot to catch the Arapaho war party before dawn.

With a deep, dark early morning sky above his head, the boy reached his compatriots. He then utilized his spiritual powers to communicate with neighboring animals and first found Bluebird perched high above in the branch of the tree. "You will lead me you who are called Bluebird. Whohei they say that birds are powerful," called out the boy. "Well friend I know it," responded Bluebird, "but I don't know about the night... I will just wait on the enemy until it becomes light." Adamant about incurring retaliation against their enemies before sunrise, the Arapaho boy next accosted Black Eagle. Conforming to the sentiments of Bluebird, Black Eagle also declined the boy's request, declaring, "I really don't know about this here night." Finally, the young Arapaho requested the assistance of Strong Hawk. Bellowing into the night air, the boy yelled, "Strong Hawk, you will lead me to the enemy." "You've come to the right person," responded Strong Hawk. "I know about the night. Strong Hawk is what I'm called; that's why I'm called that, because I'm powerful. I will lead you. Wohei come on!"<sup>40</sup>

With Strong Hawk's guidance, the Arapaho boy soon found himself on the outskirts of the thieves' encampment and prepared to make his attack. With the encouragement and guidance of Strong Hawk, the boy pulled out his blade, and ran into the tepee of his

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Moss, "*Hinóno'úi Honoh'oe*," in *Hanno' éíoo3ítóono; Arapaho Historical Tradition*, Andrew Cowell & Alonzo Moss, Sr. eds., (Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), 293-295.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 303.

adversary, and with a harsh blow knocked his enemy unconscious. At that moment the remaining members of the Arapaho war party rushed in, killing the remaining horse thieves. With the scalp of his enemy now tied around his waist and the Arapahos' precious horse stock in hand, the boy and the other warriors proudly rode back to their encampment.

Upon his return, the news of the boy's military deeds quickly spread throughout the Arapaho encampment. For his bravery the boy was awarded horses of his own, including the mystical white horse he originally requested. The young boy now possessed the tools to enter into a new stage of his life, as "he was given chasing horses... and arrows so that he could go along on hunts... He was given all sorts of things since he had done [what he had vowed.] That was how he came to belong; he became one of these men."<sup>41</sup> The oral history of "the Arapaho boy" attests to the centrality of the Arapahos' age-grade social structure in shaping an individual's deliberation process of critical social and political issues. Rather than developing his own scheme to acquire horses and social prominence, the Arapaho boy looked to the opinion of his "grandfather," a member of the band responsible for overseeing the boy's personal development and upbringing. This tendency of Arapahos to confer with elders before embarking on a decision would play a vital role in influencing Arapahos' decisions in interactions with foreign actors in the nineteenth century.

In *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978: Symbols of Crises of Authority*, the standout work on Arapaho history, Loretta Fowler dispels common misconceptions of Arapaho reservation life as riven with conflict across generational lines or between factions adhering to "progressive" and "traditional" worldviews. Fowler shows how the age-grade structure facilitated the continuance of traditional cultural roles and relationships in dealing with critical new issues facing the tribe as they adjusted to life on the Wind River Reservation.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 307.

For Fowler, a vital component underscoring the successful continuance of the age grade system on the reservation was its natural acclivity for embracing new technologies and ideas beneficial to the future of the Arapaho people. On the unique social dynamics of the Arapaho society in relationship to technology, Fowler writes:

The younger generations were expected to learn new social skills and to introduce new ideas but also to use the innovations at the behest and with the blessing of the elders. Arapahoe elders, while by and large receptive to change, interpreted and screened innovations, and through their role in validating change reaffirmed their superordinate position in Arapaho society.<sup>42</sup>

While Fowler was primarily concerned with demonstrating the continuance of the tribe's unique social relationship between the elders and younger generations as it was applied toward confronting the challenges of reservation life, this chapter attempts to elucidate the political policy formulated by Arapaho intermediaries in response to the new phenomena impacting their lives in the nineteenth century: the horse and interactions with American settlers. An analysis of the words and actions of Arapaho leaders reveals a distinct tribal political ethos, centered on a continuance of relationships and roles supported by the Arapaho's lodge system, and a proclivity to adopt new technologies and ideas congruent with the contours of their culture. In interactions with foreign actors, Arapahos continued to use intermediaries to relay pre-established decisions formed by esteemed tribal elders. The unique relationship limited the detrimental effects of many new technologies, as Arapaho intermediaries, conceptualized as "chiefs" in the minds of American agents, could not easily be bribed by horses and material goods to alter the political decision of the intermediaries' band. Finally, the tribal elders who formulated Arapaho political decisions rarely interacted with outsiders, and instead secluded themselves in the center of Arapaho

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<sup>42</sup> Loretta Fowler, *Arapaho Politics*, 9.

villages. Sheltered from the world of American settlers, the decisions of the elders reflect a greater understanding of the needs and desires of the band, leading to an aversion of warfare with the United States.

The other component of the Arapahos' nineteenth century political philosophy centered on their willingness to assimilate foreign animals, technologies and ideas into their culture that afforded advantages for their people. Through participation in the continental horse and rifle trade, the Arapahos developed into keen and prudent traders, keeping a watchful eye toward future developments that could be assimilated into their equestrian system of economic production, centered on hunting, raiding and trade. Conditioned to be dynamic by years of experience as traders, Arapaho intermediaries envisioned and worked to create their own future for their people. In their conversation with Americans, Arapaho intermediaries pragmatically utilized American legal argot, such as American civil rights and the binding nature of American treaty obligations, to defend their preferred equestrian life style.

Yet, by the late 1870s, both the Southern and Northern Arapahos found themselves living constricted on a reservation under colonial conditions, contrary to their own desires. American power, expressed through the exploitation of natural resources, purposeful negligence in upholding previous treaties, and use of military force, were powerful social institutions forcing Arapaho intermediaries to be pragmatic in their dealings with the United States. In the unique time and space of the nineteenth-century Great Plains, the Arapahos needed to utilize and manipulate the many titles bestowed upon them as well as keenly harness new technologies to their own advantage to secure a future for the *hinono'eiteen*, "our own kind of people." Arapaho intermediaries manipulated the use of cultural names assigned to them by foreign groups, as well as borrowed foreign ideas and rhetoric, such as

American conceptions of individual rights and the language of American capitalists, to pragmatically achieve goals necessary to the survival of the people and culture.

The age-grade structure was not the only cultural development influencing nineteenth century Arapaho thought, as the cultural need to provide for the less fortunate, defined within the Arapaho context as *hówouunónetiit*, or “pity,” was the paramount moral consideration amongst Arapahos and other tribes of the Great Plains. For the Arapahos, pity does not merely imply an emotional state of empathy; it also demands a response, *howóuunon*, by those in position to remedy the situation. If an Arapaho individual perceives another human being suffering from disease or hunger, the individual has “no choice” but to offer their assistance.<sup>43</sup> The value of pity left a dramatic effect on how Arapaho intermediaries interacted with the outside groups. When bargaining with the American agents, Arapaho intermediaries were bound to advocate for the needs of the most pitiful members of their tribe, often deterring them from engaging in war against the United States. Conversely, in the early nineteenth century, Arapaho intermediaries justified a policy of peace toward American expeditions such as that led by Major Stephen Long, because of the travelers’ perceived “pitiful status” as ill-equipped and undernourished. Finally, Arapaho intermediaries articulated the ethical concern of pity into a discourse with American agents as food and natural resources grew scarce. In the 1870s, seeking to receive lands, money and treaty provisions guaranteed in prior treaties, Arapaho intermediaries created a discourse requesting the United States “take pity” on their abject living condition, and provide them with annuities and a reservation.

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<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey Anderson, *The Four Hills of Life* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 54, 60.

## I

According to oral tradition, Buffalo Cow bestowed the age-grade structure to the Arapahos after a starving hunter agreed to spare her life. As the Arapaho hunter was about to release the tension of his bow, Buffalo Cow, realizing her predicament, yelped, "I am the mother of all the buffalo. Do not shoot me! I would not be enough for the entire tribe; others will follow me and you will have plenty for all the people." After the man obliged Buffalo Cow's instruction and lowered his bow, Buffalo Cow proceeded to instruct the hunter's wife to "Take a buffalo skin, and feathers from four kinds of eagles, and wave the skin before you." Following the animal's orders, the woman gathered the necessary feathers and buffalo skin, and performed the ritual wave of the skin, descending to the feet of Buffalo Cow. Gratified by the sacrament, Buffalo Cow responded, "Thanks, I am content. I will reward you." The following morning, the band of the Arapahos awoke to find their encampment abounding with bison, and the men proceeded to shoot a sufficient supply to alleviate their hunger."<sup>44</sup>

Buffalo Cow gave more than an abundant source of meat for the Arapahos; she also brought the wisdom of the lodge system, known as the *beyoowu'u*, literally meaning "all the lodges." The following morning, Buffalo Cow instructed the hunter's wife to prepare a buffalo skin full of pemmican from the venison of the freshly killed buffalo, and then summoned the village crier to congregate the encampment, for she was about to organize the Arapahos into peer groups, known as lodges. "There shall be lodges for the different societies among your people, in which my whole body can be used for various purposes,"

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<sup>44</sup> George Dorsey and Alfred Kroeber, *Traditions of the Arapaho: Collected Under the Auspices of the Field Columbian Museum and of the American Museum of Natural History* (Chicago: Field Columbian Museum, 1903), 17-19.



decreed Buffalo Cow. The village crier then called each new society into the camp's central teepee to receive the ceremonial meal of pemmican.<sup>45</sup> Progressively the criers beckoned the males of the tribe, creating eight ceremonial lodges, beginning with the youngest: *nouunenno*, 'Kit Fox Lodge'; *uhuunenno*, 'Star Lodge'; *iice 'eexoowu*, 'Tomahawk Lodge'; *biitoh'oowu*, 'Spear Lodge'; *bobookeenenno*, 'Crazy Lodge'; *he3oowu*, 'Dog Lodge'; *binono'oowu*, 'Old Men's Lodge'; *ciinecei beh 'iibobo*, 'Water Pouring Men'; and a single society, the *bénotáxx'wú*, or 'Buffalo Lodge', for women. The women of the Buffalo Lodge were responsible for the performance of the Buffalo Dance, a ceremony that functioned to fulfill the ethical requirements the Arapaho people now needed to uphold if they were to walk on the "buffalo road."<sup>46</sup>

The lodge system progressively organized Arapaho males according to their stage in life, a criterion determined not by age, but rather by an one's faculty to acquire and properly use knowledge. Arapaho cosmology classifies human beings into four primary age groups: childhood, young person, younger generation, and elders. This both linear and circular progression is mirrored in the four directions of the universe and the four seasons of Arapaho phenomenology that correlates childhood with east and the season spring, youth with summer and the direction south, west with fall and adulthood, and finally old age with winter and the direction north. Through successful completion of the "Four Hills" of life, the Arapaho tribe, like the seasons of nature, revitalized itself culturally through the proper transmission of sacred knowledge distributed at critical junctures in an individual's life.<sup>47</sup> This idea of cultural revitalization through the four stages of life is reflected in the Arapahos'

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<sup>45</sup> Tall Bear, "Origin of the Ceremonial Lodges," in *Traditions of the Arapaho*, 20-21.

<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey Anderson, *The Four Hills of Life*, 175-176.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 92-93.

creation story. After *hóuu*, Man Above, created landmass over the endless waters, at the end of four generations of people, “if the Arapaho have all died, there will be another flood. But if any of them live, it will be well with the world. Everything depends on them.”<sup>48</sup>

Around the age of twelve, an Arapaho boy became eligible to enlist in the Kit-Fox Lodge, and later in his teens became eligible to join the Stars. The Stars and the Kit-Fox societies did not possess their own ceremonies, since their membership remained in the youth group of life, only possessing the faculty to receive sacred knowledge, not perform it. Once an appreciation of the importance of the societies in Arapaho culture was gained, boys around the age of twenty were permitted to join the Tomahawk Lodge, granting them the opportunity to participate in the buffalo hunt and war parties for the first time. The institutional structure of the Tomahawk Lodge as well as all the proceeding adult lodges, functioned to establish consensus, as the age-grade brothers of the lodge were required to follow the actions of their leader in ceremonies, hunting tactics, and military maneuvers on the battlefield.<sup>49</sup>

To progress into further lodges and stages in life, young Arapaho males needed to rely on the assistance of elders. Arapaho Jessie Rowledge asserts that when boys enlist in the Kit-Foxes, each boy “chooses a man from among the *Bétáhánán*’ [Spear Lodge] as his grandfather. This grandfather advises him and gives him words of encouragement.” Consensus between the apprentice and his ceremonial grandfather is guaranteed, for “the Fox and his grandfather must always agree.” Moreover, leaders of the lodges for youth were not selected from an existing member of the lodge, but rather from two levels above it. A

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<sup>48</sup> George Dorsey and Alfred Kroeber, *Traditions of the Arapaho*, 16.

<sup>49</sup> Inez Hilger, *Arapaho Child Life and its Cultural Background* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1952), 118-119; Jeffery Anderson, *Four Hills of Life*, 140-146.

member of the Tomahawk Lodge for instance, would be eligible to serve as leader of the Kit Fox Men, a lodge two degrees below it. Many Arapaho males did not care to take on the new responsibility. Jessie Rowledge recalled:

When they hear that they are being sought after as leaders, they hide... But the Fox, being wise to this, keep an eye on the one they want to choose as leader and pursue him. But they lose him. Maybe around three or four in the morning, they find him. They surround him and grab him. By force they take his hands and hold them around the pipe. After his hands have touched the pipe, he can't refuse but to be their leader. Then they lead him back to camp. Here they call on an old medicine man that advises and lectures the Fox and their New Leader.<sup>50</sup>

Through a social structure which placed young men in a position of subservience to their elders for social advancement, the lodge system of Arapaho society reinforced the status and authority of the Water Powering Men and other elders in the Arapaho tribe, but also worked to create a collective cohesion between the different interests of an individual band, leading to less factionalism in deliberations on critical issues facing the Arapahos.

The Spear Lodge was comprised of veteran warriors and marked the beginning of a young man's entrance into the younger generation of adulthood, as he now possessed the faculty for "doing things" with knowledge. Members of the Spear Lodge served as the Arapahos' police force and soldiers in military conflicts. The lodges of male adulthood, the Spear Lodge, Crazy Lodge, and Dog Lodge, all centered on the performance of religious rituals during the Sun Dance, were hierarchically ranked to encourage competition in the performance of socially esteemed actions. They relied on the assistance of grandfathers to share sacred knowledge to further their development as individuals.

Once an Arapaho male entered his early sixties, he was eligible to join the Old Men's Lodge, entailing a new relationship with knowledge and society. As Old Men, Arapaho

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<sup>50</sup> Inez Hilger, *Arapaho Child Life*, 121.

elders now primarily served as sources of knowledge for younger human generations and as intermediaries with the spiritual world. Leaving the world of “doing things,” the Old Men reflected inward and began to live the “quiet life,” slowly removing themselves from the events of the public sphere.<sup>51</sup>

From the Old Men’s Lodge, seven tribal elders were selected to serve as the *ciinecei beh ‘ihoho’*, or Water Pouring Men, the political and religious leaders of the tribe. The Water Pouring Men possessed the entirety of knowledge in the lodge system. “These seven old men embodied everything that was most sacred in Arapaho life. They directed all the lodges.” Described Kroeber, “This oldest society is therefore said to contain all the others. Every dance, every song, and every action of the lodges was performed in the direction of these old men.”<sup>52</sup> The Water Pouring Men were not only the executive authority on ceremonial knowledge and the lodge system, but also on critical political matters facing the tribe, ranging from deciding a band’s movement to absorbing a new technology. Younger members were socially bound to adhere by their deliberations because of the social reliance on elders for vital knowledge required to progress through the Four Hills of the Arapaho lifeway.

While the Water Pouring Men maintained the final authority in deciding a band’s future, Arapaho bands relied on intermediary chiefs to directly communicate and interact with outsiders. The role of the intermediary was not to exercise his own discretion while dealing with foreign actors but to execute the previously established consensus of the band he represented. Intermediaries were recruited from the eldest adult peer group, the Dog

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<sup>51</sup>Jeffery Anderson, *Four Hills of Life*, 163-164.

<sup>52</sup> Alfred Kroeber, “The Arapaho,” *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* vol. XVIII (1902), 207-208.

Lodge, or *he3own'oonu'* comprised of men in their forties and late thirties. They were selected based on their merits displayed on the battlefield as well as their reputation as a "good man" within the tribe. Ann Wolf, the daughter of Northern Arapaho Chief Black Coal, remembered that bravery was the ultimate criterion by which men were selected to serve as chiefs. The Arapaho definition of bravery was not static, as Wolf recalled, "in the early days, their bravery was usually shown on the warpath. After we had much to do with the Whites, the bravery of men was shown in dealing with the Whites."<sup>53</sup> Arapaho Carl Sweezy recollects that "to be our kind of leader," a chief needed "to spend much time talking and listening, and thinking and contemplating. By these means he could look at things clearly and fairly. He was what white people would call a statesman and a philosopher."<sup>54</sup>

## II

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Arapahos found themselves surrounded by new enemies on the Great Plains. The heaviest area of conflict was on the Southern Plains where the Arapahos and Cheyennes engaged in costly battles against the Kiowas, Kiowa-Apaches, Utes and Crows.<sup>55</sup> Colonel Henry Dodge's council with the Cheyennes, Blackfeet, Gros Venture, and "Arepahas" on October 11, 1835, provides insight into the intensity of intertribal warfare. Dodge first harangued the Arapahos for being at war with their eastern adversaries the Pawnees and Arickaras. He believed the Arapahos and their enemies could "meet on the Platte as friends, where there is buffalo in abundance;

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<sup>53</sup> Inez Hilger, *Arapaho Child Life*, 190.

<sup>54</sup> Carl Sweezy and Atena Bass, *The Arapaho Way: A Memoir of an Indian Boyhood* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1966), 19.

<sup>55</sup> Donald Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 18-19.

you will then have no dread on your minds of danger from each other.” Next, Dodge congratulated the “Arepahas” for brokering a peace with the Osages to the south.<sup>56</sup> Although the presence of Colonel Dodge foreshadowed the future, in the first half of the nineteenth century the Arapahos and Cheyennes engaged in warfare constantly with rival tribes to secure access to the hunting grounds, pasture lands and trade corridors along the Front Range prior to intense interaction with American settlers.

While the horse made a tremendous impact on Arapaho foreign policy through increasing the prevalence of violence in their lives, its effect within Arapaho domestic life was less detrimental, as the lodge system provided avenues for the animal’s integration. Other than its primary economic function, the horse quickly evolved into an indicator of social status and became an essential gift bestowed to an Arapaho during important social occasions in their life development. After the birth of a newborn, members of the band welcomed the new addition to their community by bestowing gifts for the child’s future, the most prominent of which was the child’s first horse. Generally a relative was obliged to perform this task, proclaiming at the welcoming ceremony, “I want the child to have a pony I have.” Riding for Arapaho children traditionally began at three years old. Children continued to receive horses as gifts as they grew older and commonly owned numerous horses by adolescence.<sup>57</sup>

Through the lodge system and gift giving practices, horse ownership proliferated to include all members of society. Women owned horses, often receiving them from men in exchange for new sets of moccasins or other pieces of clothing they crafted. Upon marriage

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<sup>56</sup> Henry Dodge, *Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, under Col. Henry Dodge to the Rocky Mountains in 1835*, American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. 6, (February 29, 1836), 141.

<sup>57</sup> Inez Hilger, *Arapaho Child Life*, 109.

a man did not inherit claim to his wife's horses, as one Southern Arapaho woman confirmed, "Both Arapaho men and women have always owned things, and they had rights regarding the disposal of their belongings." She recalled in one example that there was a "young man who married a girl who had ponies in her own right. He cared for them but never claimed them as his own."<sup>58</sup> From years of experience as traders, private ownership was a well-engrained idea in nineteenth century Arapaho society, facilitating the horse's societal adoption. The horse, while evolving into the ultimate indicator of power, integrated into existing Arapaho social traditions of reciprocal gift giving reinforced by the lodge social structure, functioning to reinforce the importance of the lodge system, rather than attenuate at its authority.

After the opening of the Santa Fe Trail by American merchants in 1821, American settlers became increasingly common sights along the Red Road of the Front Range, providing opportunities for Arapahos to manipulate foreign expectations to secure their own interests. To gain an understanding of the value of the lands and natural resources acquired under the Louisiana Purchase, the United States government commissioned Major Stephen Long to lead an expedition to map the Platte River area. On the July 26, 1820, in an unexpected discovery on the Arkansas River, Long's expedition encountered an Indian encampment, "consisting of conic elevations or skin lodges, on the edge of the skirting timber, partially concealed by the foliage of the trees." In their ascent toward the river encampment, Long's party spooked the Indian's grazing horse herds, out to pasture in the grasses surrounding the camp. As the horses retreated to the confines of the Indian camp, Long and his compatriots quickly were surrounded by dozens of Plains Indians on horseback. Luckily for Long's party, the Plains Indians encamped on the Arkansas were

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

interested in trade, and “shook us by the hand, assured us by signs that they rejoiced to see us, and invited us to partake of their hospitality.” From their amicable impression of the Indian gathering, Long’s expedition agreed to bivouac adjacent to the Indian encampment along the Arkansas River, and were afforded a hearty meal “in sufficient quality for the consumption of two or three days.”<sup>59</sup> For the next four days, Long’s expedition lived amongst the multi-tribal trading encampment, comprised of Cheyennes, Comanches, Kiowas, and Arapahos.

The observations of the Long expedition’s translator Thomas Say provide a glimpse into early nineteenth century Arapaho political relations. According to Say, the entirety of the Indians congregated at the trading encampment appeared to universally revere the Arapaho chief Bear Tooth, describing that “his influence extends over all the tribes of the country in which he roves.” Say noted the diplomatic relationship between the Arapaho and the “Shiennes, or Shawhays,” viewing the later as politically subservient to the former, believing the Cheyennes “fled their country and placed themselves under the protection of Bear tooth.”<sup>60</sup> Although Say’s reflections are inherently distorted by his Euro-American worldview and bias, his words confirm the efficacy of the Arapaho-Cheyenne political alliance in the early nineteenth century, as well as the Arapaho diplomatic strategy of friendliness toward American actors. By establishing relations with the United States, Bear Tooth sought to gain leverage in his tribe’s current relations of war against the Utes, Pawnee, and Mexican forces. As steadfast traders, the Arapahos were astutely cognizant of the firearms possessed by the American explorers. Through the establishment of friendly

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<sup>59</sup> Edwin James, Stephen Harriman Long, and Thomas Say, *Account of Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains Performed in the Years of 1819-1820* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1823), 40-41.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 51-53.



diplomatic relations, Bear Tooth's Arapahos sought to acquire a new ally in their skirmishes along the Arkansas, as well as an additional source to acquire needed material goods such as firearms, foodstuffs, and metal cookware.

In his mapping expedition to the Rio Grand River, Major Jacob Fowler noted that Arapaho intermediaries were quick to utilize Western notions of identity for their economic advantage. In the fall of 1821, "a tall Indean" approached Major Fowler's party on horseback. After shaking hands with everyone in Fowler's party the Indian intermediary declared, "Me Arapaho Cheef, White man mine," and proceeded to offer buffalo robes for sale to Fowler's party. The Arapaho intermediary continued to trade and feast with Fowler's expedition for two additional days. By identifying himself as an Arapaho, a tribe described by Fowler as "the Best and most Sivvel to the White men Habits," this Arapaho intermediary expressed to Fowler's party that his primary interest was trade. This interaction demonstrates how Arapaho intermediaries utilized and manipulated foreign perceptions of their identity for their own advantage. Through the acquisition of luxury items for trade, this Arapaho intermediary could bestow gifts to members of his tribe upon his return, increasing his status within the tribe, as well as consolidate his standings with American traders.<sup>61</sup>

In 1840 the Arapahos played a critical role in brokering a major peace between their allies, the Cheyennes, and the Kiowas, Apaches, and Comanches. After the massacre of the thirty-eight young Cheyenne warriors at the Battle of Wolf Creek, the Cheyennes maintained a militant stance toward the three Southern tribes. An Arapaho chief named Bull was married to an Apache woman, and her kin frequently visited Bull's band maintaining kinship

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<sup>61</sup> Jacob Fowler and Elliot Coues, ed. *The Journal of Jacob Fowler; Narrating an Adventure from Arkansas through the Indian Territory, Oklahoma, Kansas Colorado, and New Mexico, to the sources of Rio Grande Del Norte, 1821-22* (New York, Francis P. Harper, 1898) 54-55.

relations between the two peoples. On one such sojourn, the Apache relatives of Bull's band member relayed that the Kiowas and Comanches desired to establish peace with the Cheyennes and Arapahos. The Arapahos quickly relayed this message of amity to the Cheyennes, who proceeded to extend diplomatic efforts to end violence and raiding against the Kiowas, Comanches and Apaches.<sup>62</sup>

The intertribal peace allowed the horse and gun trade of the Southern Plains to prosper, consolidate, and grow, as violent exchanges of horse raiding along the southern Front Range were replaced by peaceful interactions of commerce. In 1840, Sage noticed that the Arapahos "possess considerable taste for trafficking, and regularly meet the Sioux, Chyennes, Cumanches, and Kuyawas for that purpose, and many of them know how to drive as a good a bargain as the most expert Yankee."<sup>63</sup> "A little below the point at which the Santa Fe Trail crosses the Cinobone," Sage and his compatriots encountered a temporary Arapaho encampment functioning for the "twofold purpose of awaiting the Cumanches and catching wild horses." Sage observed the Arapahos used two primary methods "displaying considerable tact and ingenuity" for catching wild horses. The first and most common occurred when a group of Arapahos "mounted on their fleetest chargers, having discovered a band of these animals, carefully approaching from the leeward, scattering themselves to a distance of eight or ten miles along the course their intended captives are expected to run." After the progressive relay of Arapaho riders was established, ""the chase started at a given signal, by the nearest Indian, who is relieved by the next in succession, and he by the next." Finally the "proud rangers of the prairie, exhausted by their long-continued and vain efforts

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<sup>62</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1915), 60.

<sup>63</sup>Rufus Sage, *His Letters and Papers 1836-1847*, 68.

of escape, cease to assert their native liberty, and fall easy prey to the lasso of their pursers.” The second method observed by Sage required the construction of a “stout fence from side to side, between two impassible walls of rock,” and then “the unsuspecting bands are then so startled as necessarily to be driven with the enclosure.”<sup>64</sup> For the Arapahos, trips to the outskirts of Comanchería, with its verdant expanse of buffalo grasses brought not only high quality horses through trade with their Comanche trade partners but also additional feral horses, whose value increased as the Arapahos returned to the Northern Great Plains where horses remained scarce. According to Cheyenne George Bent, feral horses possessed value because they were ideal mounts for buffalo hunts as they were “not the least bit afraid of the buffalo, as other horses were.” Feral horses were renown for their instinctual speed, as “Many of the best mustangs were also long-winded and fast, qualities which all good buffalo-runners had to have.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, the Indian Peace of 1840 granted the Arapahos access to a copious supply of horses for both warfare and hunting, securing their economic security as equestrian peoples.

Sage’s journal also attests to the continuation of the authority of elders over younger males in decision-making. After barely avoiding a potential conflict between Sage’s expedition and a group of young Arapaho warriors that approached the American expedition at full speed and in war formation, an “old chief” chastised the young Arapaho men for their brash decision. According to Sage, the elder remarked, “My people must not deceive themselves. The pale faces are brave and kill their enemies a long way off.” Dictating to an American pistol he continued, “Those would have laid many of my warriors low, after the

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<sup>64</sup> Rufus Sage, *Rocky Mountain Life...* (Boston: Wentworth & Company, 1858), 315.

<sup>65</sup> George Hyde, *Life of George Bent: Written From his Letters*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 37.

medicine irons had spoken their death words.” This particular band of Arapahos averted bloodshed because the age-grade structure of Arapaho society granted elders the authority to subdue the preference for a military solution of the younger men of the band.<sup>66</sup>

### III

In 1851, The Arapahos received their first test against Western concepts of property from their first treaty with the United States at Fort Laramie. In June of 1850, Superintendent of Indian Affairs D. D. Mitchell convened with Indian Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick at Fort Skinner on the Arkansas River. From Fort Skinner, runners were sent out carrying word “to call a council of all the prairie tribes, for the purpose of making and entering in to a treaty of peace and amenity for all.”<sup>67</sup> Using a common kinship metaphor, Fitzpatrick instructed runners to deliver a message to the Plains Tribes that “their Great Father” intended, “to “make restitution for any damage or injury which they were liable to or might suffer hereafter from American citizens traveling through their country.” After receiving a honorary feast and gifts, the Cheyenne and Arapahos agreed to travel to Fort Laramie to take part in the “big talk” with the American intermediaries.<sup>68</sup>

Mitchell and Fitzpatrick hoped to achieve two vital American goals in brokering the treaty. The first was to end the intertribal warfare over the prime bison hunting grounds of the southern Great Plains. Such conflict endangered the travel of American pioneers along

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<sup>66</sup> Rufus Sage, *His Letters and Papers*, 256.

<sup>67</sup>“Report of Thomas Fitzpatrick, Indian Agent of the Upper Platte and Arkansas,” September 24, 1850. U.S. Congress. 31<sup>st</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. House Document 1, 51.

<sup>68</sup>“Thomas Fitzpatrick to Commissioner of Indian Affairs L. Lea,” November 24, 1851, U.S. Congress. 32<sup>nd</sup>. 1<sup>st</sup> Session. Senate Document 1, 332-33.

the Santa Fe and Oregon trails, hampering American economic expansion. Their second goal was to standardize and organize the native populations of the Great Plains into neatly organized tribes and geographies with official “head chiefs” with whom “all national business will hereafter be conducted.” Signing for the Arapaho was Little Owl, Medicine Man, and later Cut Nose. The treaty also stipulated jointly sovereign territory for the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes. The Arapaho and Cheyenne were recognized to possess claim over much of what is now present-day Colorado, and Southern Wyoming. The Platte River acted as the northern border of their joint territory, with the Arkansas River serving as a border to the south. The Arapahos’ and Cheyennes’ willingness to hold territorial claim to the Front Range in common evidences that sovereign claim to the Front Range was deemed important not because of any monetary value the land may hold, but rather for its importance as a supply of the critical natural resources of wild game, pasture lands, water and wood the two tribes relied on for the continuance of their equestrian lifestyle.<sup>69</sup>

At Fort Laramie, the Arapahos relied on traditional methods for interacting with foreign populations, rather than fulfilling the Americans’ request to assign the position to a single individual possessing complete authority over their band. In their selection of “Head Chiefs,” the Arapahos elected intermediaries to represent the tribe in foreign relations with the United States instead of nominating those who held political authority, the Water Pouring Men. After the deliberation process and selection of Medicine Man and Little Owl, it was the tribal elder Anishanash who congratulated Fitzpatrick and Mitchell for making peace, not the newly elected “Head Chiefs.” Elder Anishanash promised that the Arapahos would keep their word because “the Great Spirit is over us, and sees us all.” In the face of

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<sup>69</sup> *Treaty of Fort Laramie with Sioux, Etc., 1851*. September 17 1851, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II: Treaties*, Charles Kappler ed. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 594-596.

American attempts to institute a system of executive control on the Plains Tribes, the Arapahos continued cultural practices of selecting an intermediary with little personal power to deal with outside populations, manipulating American conceptions of power to facilitate the continuance of their own culture.<sup>70</sup>

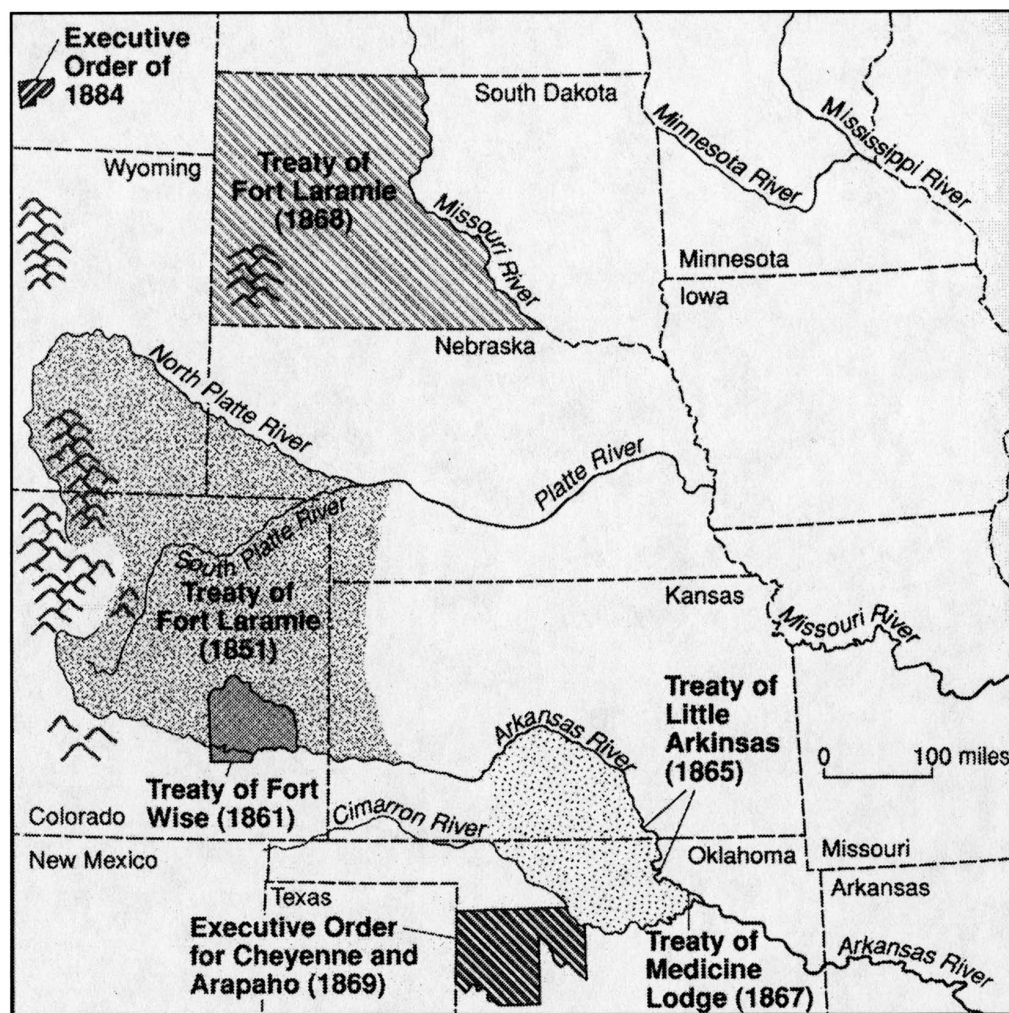


Figure 2.1 Map of Arapaho Territories in the Nineteenth Century<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Loretta Fowler, *Arapaho Politics*, 28.

<sup>71</sup>Map of Arapaho Territories in the Nineteenth Century," Courtesy of *Handbook of North American Indians*, Raymond DeMallie and William C. Sturtevant eds., vol. 13.2, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991).

In matters concerning territory, the Arapahos demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the authority of claims to property, as they were able to establish legal claim to the territory of the Front Range between the North and South Platte Rivers. The intertribal conflicts over the remaining buffalo populations, as well as the Indian Peace of 1840, ingrained in the minds of Arapaho intermediaries the value of sovereign claims to land. At the end of the treaty council, Blackhawk, a disgruntled Oglala leader vented, "we met the Kiowas and the Crows and whipped them at the Kiowa Creek just below where we now are... This last battle was fought by the Cheyennes, Arapahoes and Oglalas combined, and the Oglalas claim their share of the country."<sup>72</sup> Despite Blackhawk's protest, the Arapaho and Cheyenne maintained sovereign control over the contested territory between the Platte Rivers by using their powerful ally the United States to deter their adversaries' claims to the Front Range. Friendly relations with the United States had paid off, at least for the moment.

In the years that followed the Treaty of Fort Laramie, the Plains Tribes quickly came to the harsh realization that the existence of American settlers on the Northern Plains was not an ephemeral phenomenon. As the Plains Tribes could no longer rely on the buffalo and other game for sustenance, raiding became an increasingly prevalent alternative means to acquire food and extract payment from trespassing American settlers. In 1855, an undernourished band of Arapahos resorted to slaughtering forty-eight cattle owned by an American rancher. The aggravated rancher demanded the scandalous sum of 15,000 dollars in compensation for his slain stock. To appease the rancher, Northern Platte Indian Agent Thomas Twiss redirected Arapaho annuity funds. In consultation with the guilty band, the Arapahos explained their actions to Twiss, "by saying they were starving; that the small pox was raging in their lodges, preventing them from going out to hunt buffalo." In the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 32.

Arapaho worldview, human beings, because they possess a soul, are entitled to the right to access resources and game when in a destitute and pitiful state. Conversely, human beings in positions of privilege and wealth were obligated to give food, clothing and shelter to any human being living in such misery. This Arapaho social concern of mutual responsibility *vis-à-vis* the utilization and ownership of resources conflicted with the legal system of private ownership advocated by Euro-Americans. Despite their logical explanation based on their pitiful status, the Arapahos lost the annuity funds promised by the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie. This loss proved to be a blow to their well being, as their dependence upon annuity payments and supplies had only increased with the decline of wild game populations.<sup>73</sup>

More than any other Plains Indian tribe, the Arapahos directly felt the repercussions of the 1858 Pike's Peak Gold Rush, as American goldseekers established their cities on the coveted ecotones where the trinity of vital resources, water, wood, and game abounded. Nearly overnight, the Arapahos found their winter encampments transformed into bustling frontier towns with the newcomers consuming the dwindling natural resources of the Front Range at a voracious rate. On February 24, 1858, after overhearing rumors from his Cherokee in-laws discussing the possibility of gold deposits in the Rocky Mountains, Georgian William "Green" Russell organized an expedition party comprised "of about one hundred men, a portion from Arkansas and Missouri, and a portion of Cherokee Indians," traveled to the Rocky Mountains in search of the rumored gold deposits. Russell's premonition quickly transformed him into a wealthy man, for after "ten or twelve days," his

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<sup>73</sup> "Report of Thomas Twiss, Indian Agent of the Upper Platte," October 8, 1855, U.S. Congress. 34<sup>th</sup>. 1<sup>st</sup> Session. House Document 1, 402.



party “had taken about \$1,000... with no mining tools.”<sup>74</sup> Russell’s discovery provided the spark to entice American settlers, suffering from a lagging national economy to flood onto the Front Range.

For intermediary Chief Niwot, the arrival of Russell’s mining expedition to the Front Range reminded him of the dramatic increase of American settlers and wagons journeying across his lands to the gold mines of California only a decade earlier. He decided to visit American settlements east of the Mississippi River in the fall of 1858 to determine the true intentions American settlers had in store for his people. While Niwot’s journey east escaped the historical record, on his return trip at Fort Kearney on the South Platte Trail, Niwot and his family joined an American wagon train under the lead of Marshall Cook. As traveling companions, Niwot and Cook entered into many campfire discussions, giving the latter an insight into the Arapaho chief’s future plans for his people. According to Cook, Niwot’s “trip had been made with a view to familiarize himself as to how their white aggressors procured the means of substance by cultivating the soil and what kind of diets they obtained out of the ground.” Although pleased with the results of his expedition, in one campfire discussion, the chief told Cook that he “would not recommend the white-man method of gaining subsistence” for his people, but rather “wanted the Great Father to start his tribe in the cattle business as it was most like their native occupation.”<sup>75</sup> The events of the 1850s convinced Niwot that change was on the horizon for his people. Yet, he intended that the Arapahos would catalyze its formation by actively embracing ranching and herding to perpetuate their equestrian life style.

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<sup>74</sup> *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, August 28, 1858.

<sup>75</sup> Marshall Cook, “Marshall Cook Manuscript,” 1880s, Collection 1205, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado, 148.

After a three-week journey, in October the traveling companions arrived at the encampment of Niwot's kin at Beaver Creek along the Southern Platte River. An ideal winter encampment due to "the protecting influence of the towering forest of stately cottonwoods that grew on the banks of the latter stream, thus sheltered from the severity of winter." The return of Niwot was a celebratory affair for the Arapahos, and as nightfall progressed, the band prepared a feast for the return of Niwot and his family, inviting Cook's party to attend as guests of honor. Only a minority of Cook's American companions took up the invitation, but those who did witnessed "a grand Cold Water Banquet," where "Bonfires were kindled with the nation's favourite combustibles, which blazed high in the night air, and made the grand expanse nearly as light as day," creating a speculator ambience for the foreign guests. Niwot offered a toast to his American guests despite the lack of provisions to feast on, declaring:

We are sensibly affected that we cannot offer you but a poor welcome compared with the receptions common among your people. Be assured that the best feelings of respect are felt toward you and all we can offer you at present in a hearty welcome to visit our village, and pay through our country.<sup>76</sup>

Niwot's toast elicits a clear understanding that Arapaho land claims entitled his people to extract a tariff on those who travelled through their grounds, using up wood resources and exacerbating the scarcity of game, now a very serious matter facing the tribe.

Niwot's brother Neva was not as amicable to the American pioneers, but rather was suspicious of their intentions for settling on Arapaho lands. Cook reported that after proposing a toast to the "health of the Great Father in Washington," Neva sternly orated:

Long have we heard watched, and wondered, at the rapid progress of our white brothers. Only a few years hence we thought the Mississippi River a formidable barrier, hardly had we become pacified when the great steam horse came pouring up the old muddy created new apprehension, but as no settlements were commenced on

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 161.

the west bank of that turbulent stream, we were somewhat were the continued String of Wagons, and the Swarming multitudes of people going west, and now the Prairie Schooner has commenced rolling up the valley of the South Platte, and what will come next the Great Father of Washington around the hunting grounds.<sup>77</sup>

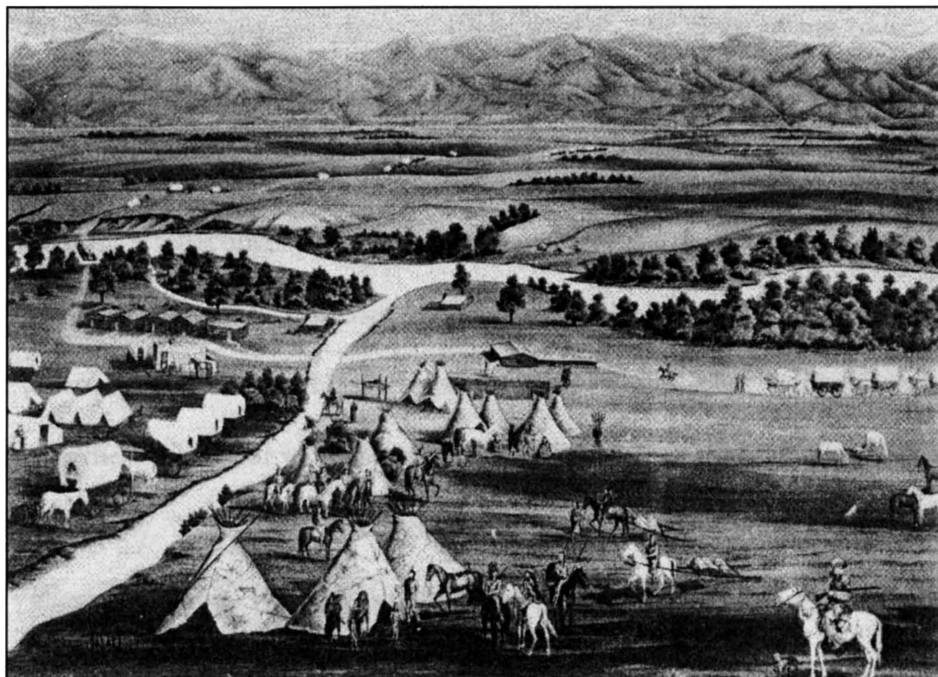
Neva clearly understood the American pioneers intention to colonize his people's land, venting his frustration that Arapaho claims to territory were being broken as wagons of settlers trespassed and established residencies illegally on Native land. Neva suspected that the Great Father himself was an active participant in the plan to colonize Indian lands, sarcastically expecting that soon the President himself would soon settle on Arapaho territory. Ironically, Neva's derisive prophecy included a current of truth, as a man emulating the Great White Father, John Evans, would soon become the second territorial governor of Arapaho and Cheyenne territory, completing the breach of Arapaho and Cheyenne sovereignty over the lands of the Front Range.

Little Raven's band was the first to find their winter hunting grounds along Cherry Creek under American colonization in the winter of 1858. Little Raven pursued a policy of peace toward the growing number of miners on Cherry Creek and established his band's winter camp on the periphery of the burgeoning frontier city. In the spring of 1859, Little Raven expressed his opinion of the growing American presence at a public forum in Denver City. *The Rocky Mountain News* reported that Little Raven expressed that he "liked all the whites that he ever had anything to do with," and was pleased "to see them getting all the gold they could, but he hoped they would be patient with all his children that are scattered around the prairies and not say anything bad to them, and they would not stay around very long."<sup>78</sup> The following evening, Little Raven was invited to a dinner party, where he left

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 162.

quite an impression on his American hosts, as “He handles knife and fork and smokes his cigars like a white man.” Yet, despite Little Raven’s shrewd diplomacy, the American settlers ignored his claim to the lands of the Front Range as established by the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie, beginning a new phase of difficulty for the Arapahos in interactions with their American neighbors.



*Figure 2.2 Denver in late 1858.*<sup>79</sup>

When Niwot’s band of Arapahos migrated to their winter encampment in late October 1858, to their shock an American expedition of gold miners led by Henry Atkins was in the process of settling the valley, with a rudimentary log cantonment already constructed. The American presence created an unsettling feeling in the minds of Niwot’s

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<sup>78</sup> *Rocky Mountain News*, May 14, 1859.

<sup>79</sup> “Denver in late 1858,” by John Glendein, Courtesy of the Colorado Historical Society.

Arapahos, as they relied upon the bountiful resources of the verdant Boulder Valley. Quickly, Niwot set about to resolve the situation, riding out toward the encampment accompanied by the daunting presence of two Arapaho headmen Bear Head and Many Whips. Initially, he maintained a threatening posture toward Aiken's mining outfit, commanding, "Go away, you come to kill our game, to burn our wood, and to destroy our grass."<sup>80</sup> But after the "crafty gold seekers affected to do obeisance to big Indian," through fawning over him with delicacies such as sugars, coffee, and a hearty beef steak, Niwot agreed to maintain peaceful relations with Atkin's men. Bear Head took great offense to Niwot's decision, interjecting, "Do you remember when the stars fell?" "1832," responded Niwot. "That is right, it is that year white man first came. Do you know what that star with a pointer means?" To this Bear Head chastised, "The Pointer points back to when the stars fell as thick as the tears of our women shall fall when you come to drive us away."<sup>81</sup>

Both Many Whips and Bear Head could not fathom ceding Arapaho claims to Boulder Valley. Subverting the authority of Niwot, Bear Head granted the American bullion seekers three days to vacate the Arapaho hunting grounds before a military reprisal. Atkin's men belligerently boarded up the small windows of their cabin in preparation for the ensuing Arapaho attack. After the conclusion of three nights, Many Whips solemnly rode toward the miner's fortified outpost, evidencing peaceful intentions. Receiving a tense yet cordial reception, Many Whips reiterated a dream of one of his elders to Atkin's party. With an eagle's view, the elder dreamed, "he watched as the waters of Boulder Creek rushed up and

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<sup>80</sup> A. Bixby, "History of Boulder County," in *History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valleys, Colorado* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1880), 379-380.

<sup>81</sup> Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, Vol. 1, (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Company), 225-226.

drowned his people while the whites survived.”<sup>82</sup> Many Whips’ political reversal demonstrates the Arapaho political axiom of establishing tribal consensus and deferment to elders on pivotal political issues, such as engaging in warfare. Although Many Whips’ blood may have boiled in delivering a message that implied peace, his compliance with the elders’ decision demonstrates the effectiveness of the lodge systems proclivity for averting conflict.

With the decrease in wild game after the gold rush, Arapaho leaders realized a new treaty with the United States government would be needed to maintain the future survival of their people. On January 25, 1861, Niwot and two other Arapahos went to the polls in a local Denver election and “offered their votes, which were refused, on the ground that their property was not subject to taxation.”<sup>83</sup> Despite their disenfranchisement in the political process, the actions of Niwot and the two Arapahos displayed their willingness to adopt the ideas and systems of their colonizers for their own defense. Through voting, Niwot and his companions sought to achieve a change in policy through their participation in democratic elections, utilizing a foreign idea for their own interests.

Later that spring, Chief Niwot again used an additional foreign social medium to express his vision of a future relationship between Americans and Arapahos. Before a formal meeting with Federal agents, Niwot accompanied by a military guard attended the evening’s theater performance at the Apollo on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1861. After the show’s commencement, Niwot delivered “a handsome speech” in which he expressed his desire that “his white brethern would stop talking about fighting with his people, because his people had no enmity against them whatever but looked upon them as brethren.”<sup>84</sup> Niwot’s

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<sup>82</sup> A. Bixby, “History of Boulder County,” 379-380.

<sup>83</sup> *Rocky Mountain News*, January 28, 1861.

speech illustrates the Arapahos' propensity to seek out foreign technologies and customs and manipulate them to serve the ends of their own interests, as the theatre audience served as a platform to influence cross-cultural foreign relations.

The next day, the Arapaho delegation comprised of chiefs Niwot, Little Raven, Storm and Shaved Head, accompanied by "some twelve or fifteen 'braves,'" attended a council with Colonel Boone. A correspondent from the *Rocky Mountain News* was also present, broadening the Arapaho's audience to all the literate citizens of Denver City. At the Council, Little Raven expressed his uncertainty that "the white people of this region would entertain and carry out the same kind feelings toward his tribe that the Great Father had so often expressed towards them." Noting the Arapahos' amicable policy toward the American newcomers, Little Raven expected, "his people would one day receive pay for the land now occupied by the whites." For "he knew that the whites were taking large sums of gold from the mountains- that the cities and villages springing up around him were built upon the Indians' land and with the Indians' timber." Despite these injustices, Little Raven remained confident that the "Great Father would make adequate returns for all this," and said that he "thought the Government ought to pay the Indians in coin instead of goods." Finally, Little Raven noted that the peaceful tribes of the Plains planned to arrange a large intertribal council in the vicinity of Denver, which he hoped "would result in a permanent treaty of peace and good understanding with the whites, to know just what territory they had ceded to the Government, and what was held in reserve."<sup>85</sup> Little Raven's demands for "coins instead of goods," and desire to know the spatial ownership of tribal land reflects a growing inclination toward Western systems of property and power. With the Colorado Gold Rush

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<sup>84</sup> *Rocky Mountain News*, April, 29, 1861.

<sup>85</sup> *Rocky Mountain News*, April 30, 1861.

in full swing, the Arapahos were astutely cognizant of the power of commodity-currencies such as the horse and later gold provided for assuring the longevity of his people.

#### IV

By 1860, 100,000 American settlers all seeking their own share of the profits from the gold mines now inhabited the Front Range. Dreams of gold, however, were not the only hope in the minds of American pioneers, for as Colorado pioneer Edward Wynkoop reminisced, "The first thing Americans think of when they emigrate to a new country is to lay out a town-site expecting of course that their town will someday become the metropolis of the world."<sup>86</sup> American settlers along the Front Range wished to build a magnificent city as a monument attesting to their capitalist industry at Cherry Creek. To accomplish this colossal feat, the settlers knew, that railways, the lifeblood of nineteenth century American capitalism, were required to transform their sheltered frontier city into a booming metropolis at the heart of the continent. Horace Greeley, the epitome of Western expansionists, predicted, "A railroad from the Missouri to the heads of the Platte or Arkansas would reduce, in those mines the average cost of food at least half and would thereby diminish sensibly the cost, and increase the profit of digging gold." Not only would a railroad increase the profitability of gold mining operations, it also would supply the additional resources of steel and material goods needed for further settlement of the region. Greeley theorized, "If one hundred thousand persons can manage to live in the Rocky Mountain

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<sup>86</sup> Edward Wynkoop, *Wynkoop's Unfinished Colorado History*, Collection 696, Folder 2, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.



gold region as it stands, three hundred thousand could do better there with a railroad up from the Missouri.”<sup>87</sup>

On May 16, 1862, John Evans, the recently appointed Territorial Governor of Colorado, arrived in Denver. A fervent expansionist, Evans dreamed of creating a new industrial metropolis along the Front Range economically centered on mining and agriculture. The citizens of Denver greeted their new governor at the Tremont House with the best stately reception the bustling frontier city could offer. After toasts to the health of the new governor, “two or three pieces” performed by the Rocky Mountain Band, John Evans proceeded to deliver a speech from the balcony, while the hues of dusk glistened across the Rocky Mountains as the sun descended for the evening. “On my arrival here this morning, I found a busy city,” began Evans. “When I learn that all this has been done in the face of most disheartening circumstances- when famine prices for food rule,” think of what can be accomplished “when that great commercial auxiliary, the railway brings cheaply and abundantly your necessary supplies!” He continued, “While in Washington a few weeks since, I received encouragement to believe that the great iron highway you so much need, will at no distant day connect you with the East.” To which a thunderous applause erupted.<sup>88</sup> John Evans was intent on bringing the railroad to Denver, seeking to transform this bustling frontier town into a booming metropolis, a testament to the industrious nature of civilized man.

The railroad companies were apprehensive about building a railroad across the Colorado prairie, as the Plains Indians raided wagon trains at a voracious rate, taxing

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<sup>87</sup> Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey, from New York to San Francisco, in the Summer of 1859* (New York: C. M. Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860), 373.

<sup>88</sup> *Rocky Mountain News*, May 17, 1862.

pioneers for the damage they inflicted on game populations. On June 27, 1864, Evans issued a military notice “To the Friendly Indians of the Plains,” to clear the Great Plains of the hostile Indians impeding investors from financing a railroad project. His notice decreed, “the Great Father is angry, and will certainly hunt them out and punish” those responsible for the incessant raiding of pioneer caravans and horse raids, but “he does not want to injure those who remain friendly to the whites.” To prevent unnecessary bloodshed, Evans sought to separate the peaceful Indians from the hostile, by directing:

All friendly Indians keep away from those who are at war, and go places of safety. Friendly Arapahoes and Cheyennes belong on the Arkansas River will go to Major Colley, U.S. Agent at Fort Lyon, and friendly Arapahoes and Cheyennes of the Upper Platte will go to Camp Collins on the Cache La Poudre.<sup>89</sup>

For the most part, the Arapahos ignored Evans’ militant proclamation, as only Friday’s band reported to Camp Collins.

Soon conflict erupted on the Great Plains under the bombastic leadership of Colonel Chivington. On November 29, 1864, Chivington led Colorado’s newly created 3<sup>rd</sup> Calvary regiment and the New Mexico Volunteers toward an Arapaho and Cheyenne encampment of approximately 600 individuals at Sand Creek. As the firing commenced, Niwot, the only Arapaho chief present, “stood with his arms folded, saying he would not fight the white men, as they were his friends.” Niwot’s stoic approach to the chaos failed to avert the ensuing bloodshed and murder as choruses of American rifles erupted onto the Arapaho and Cheyenne encampment on Sand Creek, slaying the dynamic Arapaho leader among many others.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> George Davis, Leslie Perry and Joseph Kirkcleye eds., *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Volume XLI, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 964.

<sup>90</sup> Testimony of Lt. Cramer, U.S. Congress. 39<sup>th</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Senate Report 156, 74.

“From the sucking babe to the old warrior,” remorsefully recollected Wynkoop, “all who were overtaken were deliberately murdered.”<sup>91</sup> The slaughter at Sand Creek remains one of the most barbaric events in American history, as Chivington’s soldiers mutilated the corpses of the fallen Cheyennes and Arapahos in a deplorable, dehumanizing fashion. Sergeant Palmer attested at the Congressional Hearings over the Sand Creek Massacre, “the bodies were horribly cut up, skulls broken in a good many; I judge that they were broken in after they were killed as they were shot besides. I do not think I saw any but what was scalped: saw fingers cut off saw several bodies with privates cut off, women as well as men.” Approximately 160 Arapahos and Cheyennes were slain that winter morning, the majority women.<sup>92</sup>

Although Chivington’s soldiers received a hero’s welcome from the anxiety ridden inhabitants of Denver, the United States Congress, as well as “Friends of Indian” reform groups, saw Sand Creek for what it was, an outrageous act of depravity against human life. The following fall a council between the American agents with the Southern Plains Indians was held on the Little Arkansas. For the Southern Arapaho and Cheyennes in attendance, the hearing provided an avenue for the Cheyenne and Arapahos to express their opinion of the depravities committed at Sand Creek. The council began with the head of the American Commission, J.B. Sanborn, orating to the Cheyennes and Arapahos:

From rumors that have reached his ears, the Great Father at Washington received word that you have been attacked by his soldiers, while you have been at peace with his government; that by this you have met great losses in lives and property, and by this you have been forced to make war.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Edward Wynkoop, *Wynkoop’s Unfinished Colorado History*.

<sup>92</sup> “Testimony of Sergeant Lucien Palmer, U.S. Congress. 39<sup>th</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Senate Report 156, 74.

<sup>93</sup> “Camp on the Little Arkansas” October 12, 1865 U.S. Congress, 39<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, House Document 1, 703.

With his words of peace and reconciliation, Sanborn masked the true intentions the Americans sought to achieve at the Little Arkansas, the final and permanent removal of the Cheyennes and Arapahos from the Front Range. In compensation, the American delegation proposed to grant individual allotments of 360 acres to each tribal chief as well 180 acres of land for “children and squaws, who lost husbands or parents” in the massacre.

Little Raven was the prominent speaker representing the Arapaho tribe at the Little Arkansas council. Little Raven began by describing the intense psychological effects produced by the Sand Creek Massacre for the Arapaho people, orating:

There is something very strong for us that fool band of soldiers that cleared out our lodges and killed our women and children. This is strong (hard) on us. There at Sand Creek, is one chief, Left Hand: White Antelope and many other chiefs lie there; our women and children lie there. Our lodges were destroyed there, and our horses were taken from us there, and I do not feel disposed to go right off in a new country and leave them.<sup>94</sup>

Further, Little Raven emphasized his reluctance to “leave the country that God gave them on the Arkansas,” as “our friends are buried there and we hate to leave these grounds.” In response to Little Raven’s recital of his ancestral tie to the lands of the Arkansas River, Commissioner Sanborn rancorously underscored that “we have all got to submit to the tide of emigration and civilization.”<sup>95</sup>

From this harsh rebuke, Little Raven shifted the focus of his oratory to the monetary value of their usurped homeland along the Front Range. He instructed Commissioner Murphey to tell the President the Arapahos must receive “a good price, as they are digging gold on our land, and noted, “the reservation taken at Sand Creek must be

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 701.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

paid for besides.”<sup>96</sup> The Arapahos’ experience as tenured traders engrained in their worldview the value of currency-commodities. As annuity payments in goods were frequently withheld and of a substandard quality, Little Raven pragmatically demanded as compensation for his usurped lands the object that possessed the highest value in the ever-expanding market of the West. Through gold currency, Little Raven understood, not only would he receive the best return for lands usurped from tribal possession, but also would achieve the greatest level of economic flexibility, as the value of gold opened access to an array of goods necessary to nineteenth century life, such as weapons, clothing, and provisions.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 701-702.



*Figure 2.3 Little Raven with Daughter on lap, William Bent, and two of Little Raven's sons at Fort Dodge.<sup>97</sup>*

After Little Raven's oration, the Southern Arapahos and Cheyennes finally agreed to a treaty on the Little Arkansas, ceding Arapaho and Cheyenne claims to the Front Range. The Arapahos and Cheyennes agreed to a permanent reservation "commencing at the mouth of the Red Creek or Red Fork of the Arkansas River; thence up said creek or fork to its source; thence westwardly to a point on the Cimarrone River, opposite the mouth of Buffalo Creek" in Oklahoma territory. The Treaty of the Little Arkansas ceded all Arapaho and Cheyenne legal claims to the Front Range of Colorado.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Little Raven with Daughter on lap, William Bent, and two of Little Raven's sons at Fort Dodge. Courtesy of the Western History Collections University of Oklahoma Library.

Only two years later in late October 1867, the Southern Arapahos' reservation was further constricted after the Treaty of Medicine Lodge Creek in Kansas, a traditional environment for Native diplomacy. While the Kiowa, Comanche, and Plains Apache brokered new treaties with the United States on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, Little Raven insisted that his tribe would not enter into treaty negotiations without the presence of their Cheyenne allies. Following the arrival of the Cheyennes on October 22, on October 28 the Arapahos and Cheyennes completed negotiations with the United States. Treaty negotiations between the two tribes and the American agents commenced with an oration by Little Raven, whose rhetoric was pointed to the Cheyennes as much as the American agents. According to the *Missouri Democrat*, Little Raven orated, "I am glad to see my brothers the Cheyennes present. We Arapahoes have been waiting a long time to see you, and I hope you will sign the peace which we wish." Instead of making war with the whites, Little Raven cajoled the Cheyennes to attack the Utes "as much as you please, as they are your enemies, the whites are your friends." Tensions appear to have grown between Little Raven and the warrior societies of the Cheyenne, particularly the Dog Soldiers in the years following Sand Creek. Little Raven noted he heard rumors that some Cheyennes resented his willingness to protect and turn over white female hostages escaped from the Dog Soldiers' camp. Rancorously replying, "Would you have me behave like a dog?" Little Raven then turned his oration toward the American Peace Commission, declaring, "Let me have a reservation near Fort Lyon. Keep the whites away from it... When the annuities are sent to us send out ammunition and guns that we may hunt game." Finally, Little Raven suggested that the Southern Arapahos ought to receive their own reservation apart from the Cheyennes. "By

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<sup>98</sup> *Treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, 1865*, October 13, 1865, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* Vol. II: Treaties, 887-888.

placing my reservation apart from the rest,” attested Little Raven, “you cannot possibly attach any blame to my young men should anything be wrong.”<sup>99</sup> Little Raven’s clear differences with the Cheyennes toward dealing with the imposition of American settlers and their corresponding military and economic power evidences a clear divergence in political strategy between the Southern Arapahos and the Cheyennes supporting the militant aims of the Dog Soldiers. Through his desire to distance his people from the actions of the Dog Soldiers, Little Raven’s oration at Medicine Lodge alludes to his desire to refrain from future violence with the United States, a political philosophy likely handed down to him by the Water Pouring Men.

The Medicine Lodge Treaty resulted in much confusion for both the Southern Cheyenne and Arapahos, as the two people refused to settle on their new reservation between the Kansas State Boundary and the Arkansas River. The two tribes declared that Senator Henderson and the other delegates of the Peace Commission at Medicine Lodge Creek inadequately explained the boundaries of their new territory. They also remained skeptical to the quality of water flowing from the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River, claiming the water was too brackish for their horses to drink.<sup>100</sup> After nearly two years of failure to entice the two tribes to settle near Camp Supply, a Special Indian Commission, led by Felix Brunot, Nathan Bishop and W. E. Dodge arrived at the camp on August 7, 1869, to hold a special council with Arapaho and Cheyenne leaders. On August 10, Chief Little Raven accompanied by the Southern Cheyenne Chief Medicine Arrows counseled with the American Commission at Camp Supply with the hope of establishing a new reservation. There, Little Raven believed the Americans’ willingness to create a new reservation for his

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<sup>99</sup> *Missouri Democrat*, October 22, 1867.

<sup>100</sup> Donald Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, 345.



people near the waters of the North Canadian River offered an opportune moment the two tribes needed to capitalize on. In an attempt to win over the more skeptical Cheyenne chief Medicine Arrows, Little Raven proclaimed, "Here is the opportunity for the Cheyennes and Arapahos, It is their good chance, they must keep it."<sup>101</sup> Little Raven persuaded Cheyenne Chief Medicine Arrows to consent to reestablish the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation in Western Indian Territory.

As a gesture of goodwill for the longtime friendliness of the Arapahos to the United States, President Grant invited Little Raven to Washington D.C. in 1871. Little Raven and the other invitees toured the cities of New York, Boston, and Washington D.C., speaking at "Friends of the Indian" engagements along the way. At Cooper Union in New York City, Little Raven affirmed the rights of the Arapahos as a domestic yet sovereign nation to his empathetic American audience. Little Raven insisted the freedoms recognized by American citizens of equality and pursuit of happiness also be applied to the Nation's first inhabitants. "I want my people to live like white people, and have the same chance," reiterated Little Raven. "I hope the Great Spirit will put a good heart into the white people, that they may give us our rights." His speech at Cooper Union elucidates that when Little Raven advocated for additional rights, it was not to assimilate his people into the culture of Euro-America, but rather to allow the Arapahos to determine their own future. "We want to travel the same road as the white man. We want to have his rifle, his powder and his ball to hunt with," concluded Little Raven's oration.<sup>102</sup> For Little Raven, acclimating to the "road

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<sup>101</sup> Minutes of Camp Supply Council," August 10, 1869, U.S. Congress. 41<sup>st</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. House Executive Doc 1 pt 3, 495.

<sup>102</sup> "Visit of the Cheyenne, Arapahoes, and Wichita to New York and Boston, June, 1871," *Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners to the Secretary of the Interior, 1871*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 22-23.

of the white man” entailed embracing technologies deemed helpful according to Arapaho cultural standards.

## V

While the Southern Arapaho relocated to the Southern Great Plains in Oklahoma and Arkansas Territory after the Sand Creek Massacre, the Northern Arapahos under the leadership of chiefs Medicine Man, Friday, and Black Coal returned north to the hunting grounds of the Tongue River. Upon their arrival, the Northern Arapahos joined their Northern Cheyenne and Lakota Sioux allies in their defense against American expansion during Red Cloud’s War. Following a pattern of mineral rushes in the West, when gold was discovered in Montana in 1863, scores of American settlers began to flow into and through Montana and Wyoming. Seeking not to repeat the Cheyenne and Arapaho experience in Colorado, the Lakota Sioux would not give American settlers the opportunity to settle or travel through their hunting grounds in Lakota sovereign territory. This attitude was reflected in Oglala politics as the warrior societies elected to rally their support around the more militant Red Cloud rather than They Even Fear His Horses. Rallying the Sioux to unite for war in 1866, Red Cloud famously orated:

Here ye, Dakotas! When the Great Father at Washington sent us his chief soldier [General Harney] to ask for a path through our hunting grounds, a way for his iron road to the mountain and western sea. We were told that they wished merely to pass through our country, not to tarry among us, but to seek for gold in the far west. Our old chiefs thought to show their friendship and good will, when they allowed this dangerous snake in our midst. They promised to protect the wayfarers. Yet, before the ashes of the council fire are cold, the Great Father is building his forts among us. You have heard the sound of the white soldier’s ax upon the Little Piney. His presence here is an insult and a threat. It is an insult to the spirits of our ancestors. Are we then to give up their sacred graves to be plowed for corn? Dakotas, I am for war!<sup>103</sup>

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In only a few short months after their arrival at the Tongue River in present day Montana, the Northern Arapahos fell siege to the forces of General Patrick Connor. With the aid of nearly 15- Pawnee scouts, General Connor located the Arapaho camp on August 28, 1865. Connor received orders from Fort Laramie to put an end to “Indian outrages along the Bozeman Trail.” The next day Connor launched an attack against the Arapaho camp. In the ensuing battle, approximately eighty Arapahos were killed and the Pawnee scouts captured over six hundred horses.<sup>104</sup>

Despite suffering heavy losses, the Arapahos continued to fight alongside the Cheyenne and Sioux throughout Red Cloud’s War. In the winter of 1866, the Northern Arapahos notoriously fought alongside Crazy Horse at Peno Valley in Northern Wyoming during the Fetterman Massacre, known as the “Battle of One Hundred Slain” by the Allied Indians. Red Cloud’s military resistance ultimately garnered results for the Western Sioux tribes. Peace was brokered between the United States and the Northern Arapaho and Sioux tribe through the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. In the treaty, the United States agreed to close its military forts along the Bozeman Trail and affirmed Lakota control over the Great Sioux Reservation. The Treaty of Fort Laramie did nothing, however, to grant the Arapahos a permanent home. From their sacrifices of human life and horses, the Arapahos did not find themselves better off from their “victory” over the United States.<sup>105</sup>

With the ink still wet on the 1868 Treaty of Laramie, Arapaho intermediaries made an opportune political decision to reach out to their long-standing northern rivals, the

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<sup>103</sup> Charles Ohiyesa Eastman, *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains* (New York: Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1926), 7.

<sup>104</sup> Maurine Carley, “Bozeman Trail Trek; Trek No. 14 of the Emigrant Trail Treks,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 36.1 (April, 1964) 73-74.

<sup>105</sup> *Treaty with the Sioux, Brulé, Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonal, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans, Arcs, and Santee- and Arapaho 1868*, April 29, 1868, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II: Treaties*, 998-1003.

Shoshones. Staunch American allies during Red Cloud's War, for their allegiance the United States government acknowledged the Shoshones' right to the lands of the Wind River Valley. The 1868 Treaty of Fort Bridger brokered between the Eastern Shoshone, Bannocks, and the United States stipulated that the Eastern Shoshone received claim to the land "commencing at the mouth of Owl creek and running due south... to the longitude of North Fork of Wind River" to establish their reservation upon.<sup>106</sup> Despite their allied victory over the United States, Arapaho leaders had fallen short of their goal of obtaining land for their people to hunt and subsist upon. The example of Shoshone success in achieving a reservation now beacons for the Northern Arapahos to emulate.

Chief Washakie of the Eastern Shoshone could not believe his ears upon hearing the news of a request to counsel with the Arapahos. Reluctantly and under pressure from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Chief Washakie heeded the Arapaho request for a tribal council, "for when I see their faces I can understand intentions."<sup>107</sup> Despite Washakie's protests, the United States left open the legal option for additional tribes to settle upon the Wind River Reservation. The Treaty of Fort Bridger declared that the reservation:

Is set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Shoshone Indians herein named, and for such other friendly tribes or individual Indians as from time to time they may be willing, with the consent of the United States, to admit amongst them.<sup>108</sup>

The meeting between Chief Washakie and the Arapaho chiefs never occurred, for Washakie purposively avoided the Wind River Reservation by remaining hunting for months on end, an intentional Shoshone political strategy for averting American colonial demands.

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<sup>106</sup> *Treaty with the Shoshone and Bannacks*, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1868, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II: Treaties*, 854-58.

<sup>107</sup> Grace Hebard, *Washakie; An Account of Indian Resistance of the Covered Wagon and Union Railroad Invasions of Their Territory* (Cleveland, OH: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1930), 135.

<sup>108</sup> *Treaty with the Shoshone and Bannacks*.

Through this strategy Chief Washakie effectively prevented the Northern Arapahos from settling on the Wind River Reservation. After a brief and tumultuous stay, in 1870 the Northern Arapahos were sent to temporarily live with their allies the Cheyenne and Oglala Sioux at Red Cloud's Agency in Nebraska.

Life would not get any easier for the Northern Arapahos during their stay at Red Cloud's Agency. In 1874, Captain Alfred Bates, with the assistance of Shoshone scouts, attacked an Arapaho encampment of approximately 600 individuals. Northern Arapahos remember the event as the final military triumph of the Arapahos against the United States. Although ambushed, one Arapaho boy known for his reserved personality evidenced great bravery and military prowess against the American and Shoshone attack. During the battle's onset, the boy asked the Water Pouring Men to grant him a blessing and a War Bonnet for the ensuing battle. Under the protection of the Water Pouring Men's blessing, the young warrior proved immune to the bullets of his aggressors. Demonstrating great military powers, the Arapaho boy repulsed the American attack, slaying both Shoshone and American regulars on horseback. Under the young warrior's leadership, the band of Northern Arapahos successfully repulsed the military threat to their lives.<sup>109</sup>

While Bates Battle was a resounding military victory for Arapaho warriors, many of the Arapahos' horses were captured and all of their lodges razed to the ground, threatening the livelihood of the Northern Arapahos. For over a decade, Northern Arapaho intermediaries were largely unsuccessful in achieving results toward the collective good of their bands. After the Sand Creek Massacre, Northern Arapahos reestablished their alliance with the Northern Cheyenne and Lakota Sioux. Although the Northern Arapaho achieved military success with their traditional alliance, the abject, pitiful status of many members of

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<sup>109</sup> Paul Moss, "Konoúwoo'óé', The Shade Trees," in *Arapaho Historical Traditions*, 341-343.

the tribe had not been alleviated, but only further deteriorated. Clearly, the pitiful and homeless state of the Northern Arapahos required a change in the political tactics of Arapaho intermediaries.

The year 1874 marked a turning point in the Northern Arapahos' political relations with the United States. The Arapahos now desired to "walk a new road" with Americans. With Chief Washakie and the Shoshone serving as their model, Arapaho intermediaries shifted away from their political alliances with the Sioux and Cheyenne and began to enlist as scouts in the U.S. Army. In the next two years, Arapaho intermediaries assisted General Crook and the U.S. Army in their attempt to quell the violent uprising of militant bands of the Northern Cheyenne and Sioux. In all, 150 Arapaho males under the leadership of Chief Black Coal and Sharp Nose joined General Crook's forces to corral their former compatriots back to their reservations.<sup>110</sup>

Chief Black Coal decided to become a scout in the U.S. Army after General Crook, known as "Three Stars" by the Plains Indians, offered assistance in helping them find a reservation in Wyoming for their service. In an audience with President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877, Black Coal explained the process of becoming a scout in the Army. Black Coal proclaimed, "I wanted to enlist as a soldier- I did not do so at once," and instead consulted a friend in the tribe. Next, Black Coal "spoke to my friend and [he] said you are a war chief." Black Coal's step back to consult a friend suggests that he was abiding by the requirement to consult the Water Pouring Men and other elders before deciding to enlist under Crook.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> George Bourke, *On The Border with Crook* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 406.

<sup>111</sup> Council with the President, September 26-27, 1877, Loretta Fowler Papers, Collection 11403, Box 6, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Chiefs Sharp Nose and Black Coal met with President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877 to petition for a permanent reservation on their traditional northern hunting grounds. Predicated on pity, Sharp Nose offered his proposal for the future of the Arapahos to President Hayes:

“I am a poor man- only a little tribe. I wish you to take pity on me and listen to me. The Snakes are a small tribe and we are a small tribe, and we want to join the Snakes- not to join them too closely though- and have one agent to take care of us... Now I beg again, take pity on us to-day.”<sup>112</sup>

Next, it was Black Coal’s turn to address President Hayes. In addition to evoking pity, Black Coal’s oration exemplified his understanding of Western concepts of land ownership and used them to bolster his claim to live in the north. “Take pity upon me and listen to me,” bellowed Black Coal. “The Great Spirit put us on this earth and gave us the ground to live on... I was born there and all that ground belongs to me, the same as the property here belongs to your people.”<sup>113</sup>

Through utilizing both the Arapahos’ central ethic of pity and American conceptions of land, the efforts of Northern Arapaho intermediaries finally paid off. In 1877, the United States agreed to settle the Northern Arapahos with the Shoshone on the Wind River Reservation. Through a switch in central allegiances from the Sioux to the United States, the Northern Arapahos established their reservation within the domain of their traditional hunting grounds, a monumental success for the tribe, considering their tumultuous experiences since Sand Creek.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> William Shakespeare, *Sharpe Nose*, Loretta Fowler Papers, Collection 11403, Box 3, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

On the Wind River Reservation, the Northern Arapahos were forced to adopt new economic practices to survive in their constricted living conditions, and began to graze sheep and cattle, just as Niwot had envisioned nearly a half-century earlier. Edward Farlow, an American pioneer and esteemed friend to both the Northern Arapahos and Shoshones, attested to the Arapahos' natural acumen for ranching work. Farlow "learned to know the Arapaho young men real well, rode with them and found them to be expert horsemen." After convincing his boss Jules Lamoreaux to hire Arapaho cattlemen, "He put a few to work and they gave excellent satisfaction. Other stockmen gave them work and the Arapahoes were counted dependable men." The Arapahos also easily adjusted to sheering sheep wool. Farlow "put 40 Arapahoes to work shearing, branding, tossing and sacking the wool," which earned them "thousands upon thousands of dollars" during the spring sheep shearing season.<sup>115</sup> Although American power trampled the Arapahos' desire to keep living their nomadic lifestyle, by adopting congruent cultural practices such as herding and serving as scouts, and pragmatically implementing their own vision for the future, the Arapahos resisted American colonialization.

The Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho bands faced tremendous challenges and hardships during the 1870s, as the bison herds dwindled toward extinction in the natural world. In the opinion of many plains Indians, the decimation of the buffalo herds was a blatant transgression of the terms of the Medicine Lodge Treaty, where the Indians had paid dearly for the right to continue to hunt the buffalo. The loss of the buffalo and ecological change imposed by increased settlement of the Front Range required the Southern Arapahos and Cheyennes to "walk a new road" at the Darlington Reservation. "The corn

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<sup>115</sup> Edward Farlow, *Edward Farlow's Memoirs*, Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department, Cheyenne, Wyoming, 3-5.



road,” recollected Carl Sweezy, “was different from the buffalo road in more ways than anyone, white or Indian, had realized. The old people- even our tribal leaders who were great men at hunting and fighting could not learn it in a hurry.” After difficulties with farming in the early years of the Darlington Reservation, the Arapahos returned to an economic activity originally identified by nineteenth century intermediaries as an ideal economic practice to take up, cattle ranching. According to Sweezy, after a few years of crop failure, “the agents and agency farmers were ready to admit that cattle raising and dairying were better on most of our land, than raising corn and oats.”<sup>116</sup> Sweezy’s recollection of the early years of Southern Arapaho life illustrates the epitome of the Arapahos’ nineteenth century political ethos, as he continued to revere the knowledge of the elders, noting that even “the old people” were unable to successfully take up American style agriculture. Instead, the Arapahos elected to embrace a new form of economic production harmonious with their existing culture.

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<sup>116</sup> Carl Sweezy and Althea Bass, “Along Way from the Buffalo Road,” *American Heritage*, 17.6 (October, 1966): 92.



*Figure 2.4 Leaders of the Northern Arapaho, front row: unidentified man, Friday, Six Feathers, Black Coal and Sharp Nose, back row third from left, White Horse.<sup>117</sup>*

## VI

The nineteenth century was a period of great bloodshed and upheaval for the Arapaho people. To survive this tumultuous period Arapahos implemented a political policy centered on the axioms of upholding traditional cultural roles and relationships as established by the lodge system and openly embracing new technologies to “walk their own road” as the Arapaho people. The importance of relationships between generations stressed by the lodge system aided the Arapahos in assimilating the horse, as the consensus required of young men and their “grandfathers” limited internal strife. Reciprocal gift giving for important events in an individual’s progression through the “Four Hills” of the Arapaho life also assisted in the assimilation of the horse, as the animal became a staple gift bestowed

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<sup>117</sup> Leaders of the Northern Arapaho; front row: unidentified man, Friday, Six Feathers, Black Coal and Sharp Nose; back row third from left, White Horse, Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

across social hierarchies and relationships of an Arapaho band, limiting factionalism concerning the animal's economic value.

Unlike the Cheyenne and Sioux tribes, where chiefs exercised considerable autonomy in relations with Americans, the age-grade social system of the Arapahos conditioned males to rely on the judgment and benevolence of their elders. Guided by the values of pity and mutual respect, the Water Pouring Men looked to avoid violence and the suffering of their people whenever possible, and Arapaho intermediaries carried out their recommendations. The continuation of the age-grade social structure assists in explaining why young Arapaho males, requiring the assistance of their elders for social advancement, refrained from violence while their Sioux and Cheyenne contemporaries formed their own war parties without their elders' consent.

The expansion of American power over the Southern Plains was a historical process the Arapahos realized they could not combat militarily, and instead they looked to subtle ways to use the American system of power for their own advantage. By utilizing the name "Arapahoe," intermediaries secured trade for their band because of the American perception of an "Arapahoe" was peaceful and industrious. The inner and outer structures of Arapaho interaction with outsiders allowed intermediaries to play off of American expectations. While Little Raven was well known by Americans as a man who enjoyed fine cigars and openly professed his willingness to be "civilized," the true intentions of the Arapaho people were formulated away from the influence of American agents, allowing the tribe to determine their own future away from the influences of American systems of power and property.

Finally, the lodge structure facilitated the efficient assimilation to and implementation of foreign technologies and customs in Arapaho culture. The Arapahos kept

a keen eye toward future innovations that could improve their way of life in the tumultuous nineteenth century. After his travels Chief Niwot rejected an agricultural future and sought to establish a “new road” for his people centered on ranching, “as it was most like their native occupation.” The idea of ranching was validated and implemented by tribal elders who possessed the knowledge of Arapaho culture to effectively use the technology the “right way,” limiting the technology's deleterious effects. As the nineteenth century came to a close, the Arapahos found themselves utilizing foreign ideas to solve their problems in some instances, setting a precedent for future Indian Rights movements.

In his final hours on the Wind River Reservation in 1930, Sharp Nose offered his final advice to his fellow kinsmen as a guidepost for their future life on the reservation. His words encapsulated the ethos adopted by Arapaho intermediaries in dealing with the new problems faced by the tribe in the nineteenth century. As his breathing slowed, Sharp Nose whispered, “Watch out for our children and yourselves, stay together, as the Arapahoe has always been as in the beginning, be aware of the stranger and his strange ways.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> William Shakespeare, *Sharpe Nose*.

### Chapter III

“Some man might be at the same time both a Warrior Chief and a Tribal Big Chief.”

*Violence and the Evolution of Cheyenne Political Structures in the Nineteenth Century*

In the early 1830s, the Cheyenne people were befallen with a great tragedy still remembered in oral histories to this day, the loss of their sacred Medicine Arrows to the Kiowas. The four Medicine Arrows, or *Maahotse*, were gifts to the Cheyenne people from *Ma'beo'o*, the Cheyenne Creator God, and symbolize *Ma'beo'o's* own life-blood amongst the Cheyennes, validating their existence as the *Tsitsistas*, “the called out people.” As the Cheyenne warriors prepared for battle, the Sweet Medicine Chief symbolically renewed the *Maahotse* in front of his warriors. The spiritual powers of the arrows distorted the accuracy of their adversary's arrows while simultaneously instilling within the *Tsitsistas* the strength and temerity to forcefully vanquish their enemies. According to Cheyenne George Bent, the ceremony began when the Sweet Medicine Chief, “held the arrows up as though he were going to shoot them at the enemy” and then stomped his foot on the ground four times, to which a chorus of battle cries echoed each cadence. Finally, “the arrow keeper then gave the arrows to some brave man, who tied them on a lance of willow stick.” No soldier was to go in front of the *Maahotse* as he “was their shield in the fight and protected them with the power of the arrows.”<sup>119</sup>

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From the beginning, the Cheyennes' battle with the Kiowas was a strange event. At the battle's onset, an old Kiowa medicine man suffering from disease was carried out onto the Kiowa line, stating he preferred death by an arrow rather than at the ghastly hands of disease. Upon seeing this oddity, Cheyenne warriors wagered bets as to who would kill this peculiar combatant. Leading the charge, the Cheyenne soldier carrying the *Maahotse* attached to his lance was the first to attempt to kill the Kiowa elder. As he extended his lance to pierce his ill adversary, the aged medicine man reached out and grabbed the spear away from the unsuspecting Cheyenne. "This spear must be a wonderful spear," mocked the Kiowa Elder. "Come and get it."<sup>120</sup> The Cheyennes fought with great intensity to reclaim the *Maahotse*, but without the protection of their sacred arrows they were defeated by the Kiowas. Never again would the Cheyenne possess all four of the original medicine arrows, jeopardizing their existence as *Ma'heo'o's* "called out people."

After the loss of the *Maahotse*, a great meteor shower took place. This meteor shower was believed to be an exploding expression of *Ma'heo'o's* disdain with the *Tsitsistas*, and "All the Indians thought the world was coming to an end when the shower of shooting stars appeared; the dogs howled, the women sang and the men got on their war-ponies and rode about, singing their death—songs."<sup>121</sup> While the meteor shower and the loss of the medicine arrows did not bring about the Cheyennes' immediate demise, the events foreshadowed the dramatic changes that would beset them in the years to come.

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<sup>119</sup> "George Bent to George Hyde," Feb 20, 1905, George Bent Papers, WH1704, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

<sup>120</sup> George A. Dorsey, "How the Pawnee Captured the Cheyenne Medicine Arrows," *American Anthropologist* 5.4 (Oct. – Dec., 1903): 649.

<sup>121</sup> "George Bent to George Hyde," February 15, 1905. George Bent Papers, WH1704, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

The meteor shower and loss of the *Maahotse* were not the only precursors indicating the future change coming to Cheyenne society. Sweet Medicine, the cultural hero and prophet of the Cheyenne, foretold of the intrusion of two new creatures that would drastically rework Cheyenne society in the nineteenth century. In his final prophecy, Sweet Medicine warned against a “slick animal with a shaggy neck and a tail almost touching the ground.” Secondly, “Strangers called Earth Men will appear among you,” admonished Sweet Medicine. “Their skins are light colored, and their ways are powerful.” Sweet Medicine urged his people to maintain their current relationship with *Ma’beo’o* as “the called out people.” Yet, he cynically predicted:

But at last you will not remember. Your ways will change. You will leave your religion for something new. You will lose respect for your leaders and start quarreling with one another... You will take after the Earth Men’s ways and forget good things by which you have lived and in the end become worse than crazy.<sup>122</sup>

This chapter addresses the political changes in Cheyenne society during the nineteenth century. Sweet Medicine prudently realized that while interactions with settlers, soldiers and trappers prompted political and social reorganization within Cheyenne culture, nonhuman actors also acted as catalysts for change within Cheyenne society as well. Following Sweet Medicine’s lead, this chapter utilizes the horse as a tool of analysis in interpreting the social and political history of the nineteenth century Cheyenne. From the economic and military benefits the horse afforded, the horse’s quick ascension to prominence in Cheyenne society is not surprising. As with many technologies, however, the horse also imposed new drawbacks. The ownership of horses within Cheyenne society galvanized a reorganization of tribal relationships and values, as the desire to acquire horses

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<sup>122</sup> John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 40.

for social prominence and economic utility increased incidents of violence with foreign bands and American settlers and spurred internal conflict. During the early nineteenth century, the horse became the wedge that splintered the economic and social interests of the older council chiefs away from the interests of the younger males of the warrior societies.

The arrival of the Earth Men to the Front Range imposed both social and ecological challenges for the Cheyenne people. As trains of wagons traveled west on the Platte and Santa Fe trails, the scarce catches of critical natural resources of timber, fresh water and wild game scattered across the delicate ecotones of the Great Plains went under critical levels of stress. Americans brought horses and cattle of their own, increasing the competition over pasturelands not only for the Plains Indians' horses but also bison herds, threatening the economic base of an equestrian lifestyle.

American settlers brought not only a competing ecological relationship with the natural environment to the Front Range but also competing conceptions of property and power, impacting the lives of Cheyennes in profoundly subtle, but devastating ways. When Cheyennes raided trains or settlers' livestock, they transgressed new boundaries upheld by the structures of power of the expanding capitalist market. To enforce the new socio-political rules brought by the capitalist settlers, the American Army, the quintessential mechanism expressing American structures of power, used brutal and violent military tactics to enforce the new rules brought by colonialization. For the Cheyennes, then, contact with American settlers not only endangered the tenability of their equestrian lifestyle by grafting away vital nature resources, but also threatened their lives, as violence between Cheyennes and American soldiers escalated in an attempt to force compliance with the new rules of "civilization" and capitalism.



On the surface, the political structure of the Cheyenne tribe possessed a seemingly strict dichotomy between the council chiefs and warrior societies. Past historians have overemphasizing the separate importance of each institution instead of analyzing the interplay between the two. In this process, historians have unintentionally perpetuated the stereotypes of the American Indian as a “Noble Savage,” the Cheyenne council chief, or the “Fearless Brave,” the Cheyenne warrior or Dog Soldier. In *The Fighting Cheyennes*, George Bird Grinnell is guilty of committing the latter. He asserts Cheyenne males would rather die on the battlefield than become an old man, because life after the battlefield was perceived as simply not worth living. “How much better,” Grinnell advocates, “to struggle and fight, to be brave and accomplish great things, to receive the respect and applause of everyone in the camp and finally to die gloriously at the hands of the enemy!”<sup>123</sup> Grinnell's depiction of the warrior societies is an oversimplification of Cheyenne social motivations and is contradicted by historical evidence. While the mantra of a fearlessness of death was echoed across warrior socialites to boost the moral of soldiers before a battle, members of the military societies also had larger incentives to stay alive, such as becoming prominent men within Cheyenne society and acquiring wealth through the horse and firearm trade.

Conversely, in the *Peace Chiefs of the Cheyenne*, Stan Hoig romantically depicts Cheyenne council chiefs as post-violent human beings. Winning their own battles in their youth, these men are conditioned by the passage of time to fully reject their previous violent lifestyle, effectively evolving into the “noble savage.” In Hoig's romantic view, the council chiefs:

Walked tall, with great dignity of bearing, as became their positions as chiefs of the Cheyennes. Their bronze, wide-structured faces were strong with the resolve that comes to men who know no fear. Most had been great warriors as younger men

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<sup>123</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 10.

who know no fear. Most had ridden into battle many times and counted coups against enemy tribes. But now for each the ways of war were past.<sup>124</sup>

Hoig's depiction implies that Cheyenne council chiefs were simply no longer able to implement a violent course of action when deemed necessary for the survival of the tribe. This depiction oversimplifies the political acumen and cultural motivations of the Cheyenne council chiefs. Council chiefs were rational actors, influenced by their own personal interests in deliberating political issues affecting his entire band, and would resort to acts of violence if deemed necessary, as evidenced by the choices of Cheyenne council chiefs Two Moons, Little Wolf and Morning Star. For the Northern Cheyenne council chiefs after the traumatic experience of Sand Creek, peace and war became oscillating options to secure their peoples future.<sup>125</sup>

John H. Moore has written numerous works about the political organization of the Cheyenne.<sup>126</sup> Moore challenges previous histories that depict the Cheyenne tribe as a politically stable entity with complete political authority lying in hands of the chiefs of the Council of Forty-Four. Contrarily, Moore argues that the Council of Forty-Four was not the dominant political structure as commonly assumed. Instead, he contends that the Council of Forty-Four's power diminished from the added stress placed by American colonialism as the nineteenth century progressed. From analyzing the changing spatial patterns of

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<sup>124</sup> Stan Hoig, *The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 3.

<sup>125</sup> Americans knew Morning Star, Vóóhéhéve, in the nineteenth century as Dull Knife, a translation of his Sioux nickname. On the subject, George Bent remembered, "The Sioux give him this name Dull Knife, his Cheyenne name is "Morning Star," he is known by the Cheyennes by this name and not by "Dull Knife." Southern Cheyennes did not know him by Dull Knife. Maybe Northern Cheyennes know him by this name on account of the Sioux calling him by this name." "George Bent to Don Rickey," September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1904, Don Rickey Papers, WH986, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

<sup>126</sup> John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996); idem, *The Cheyenne Nation; A Social and Demographic History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

Cheyenne encampments, shifting from those centered upon feminine kin relations to masculine relations as the nineteenth century progressed, Moore contends that the warrior societies actively sought to displace the chiefs Council of Forty-Four in leadership of the tribe, effectively transforming the Council of Forty-Four into merely another warrior society.<sup>127</sup>

Moore is correct to identify the growing tensions between the council chiefs and warrior societies as the nineteenth century progressed. The commodification of the horse within Cheyenne society altered social relations by promoting social inequalities in addition to increasing violent interactions with outside groups. As warfare became common on the Great Plains, the power of the council chiefs waned as the leaders of the military societies rose in prominence. Yet, by recasting the council chiefs and warrior societies as polar extremes, uncompromising for political power, Moore fails to take into account the shared symbolism, common Cheyenne culture and kinship relations that bound these men together as a unified people. Contrarily, this chapter seeks to illustrate council chiefs adapted to cope with the increasingly violent environment of the nineteenth century Great Plains, while they also retained the position's cultural significance to the Cheyenne people. After the Sand Creek Massacre, a new generation of Northern council chiefs, including Two Moons, Little Wolf and Morning Star, broke away from the cultural tradition of advocating peace in all situations and instead elected to pursue military avenues when deemed prudent for the well being of their respective bands.

Although not members of the Council of Forty-Four or warrior societies, Cheyenne women played a crucial role in deciding the future of their peoples at points of stress in the

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<sup>127</sup> John H. Moore, "Cheyenne Political History, 1820-1894," *Ethnohistory*, 21.4 (Autumn, 1974): 333-334.

nineteenth century. When Cheyenne men failed to live up to social obligations, such as allowing their people to live in such a pitiful status as imprisonment by American soldiers, Cheyenne women demanded through song for the men to live up to their responsibilities as the “Called Out People,” and fight for their freedom. Women also played a critical diplomatic role in establishing peace with the United States, as Sweet Taste Women assisted in brokering the terms of peace between General Miles and Morning Star and Little Wolf’s bands in the 1870s. Finally, Cheyenne Women also fought in pivotal battles against the United States, as the Lakotas and Chyennes remember the Battle of the Rosebud as “The Battle Where the Girl Saved her Brother” in honor of the courage of Buffalo Road Woman.

# I

Cheyenne oral tradition tells us that Sweet Medicine, the cultural hero and prophet of the Cheyenne, accompanied by his wife, climbed the mountain peak of *Noah-vose*, known today as Bear Butte in Western South Dakota. From the crest of *Noah-vose*, Sweet Medicine received religious instruction from *Ma’beo’o*, the Cheyenne Creator God, and received the *Maahotse*, or four sacred arrows.<sup>128</sup> As gifts from *Ma’beo’o*, the *Maahotse* symbolized the acculturation of two new phenomena in the lives of the Cheyennes during their residency in the Black Hills: the hunting of bison and increased warfare against neighboring tribes. Two of the arrows were known as “buffalo arrows,” while the other two were known as “man arrows.” If the Cheyenne practiced proper care of these religious arrows, *Ma’beo’o* reciprocated power to Cheyenne, assisting them in vanquishing their enemies and insuring the continuance of the buffalo hunt. The arrows, then, represent an early tribal identity

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<sup>128</sup> John Stands in Timber, *Cheyenne Memories*, 36.

through which Cheyenne peoples shared a unifying connection with their god *Ma'beo'o* and with each other as the *Tsitsistas*.<sup>129</sup>

Sweet Medicine's instructions to the elder men is one of the stories attributed to the creation of the Council of Forty-Four, the Cheyennes' central domestic political institution comprised of the forty-four most prominent adult men.<sup>130</sup> Upon his return from *Noah-vose*, Sweet Medicine instructed the elder men, "You chiefs are peace-makers. Though your son might be killed in front of your tepee, you should take a peace pipe and smoke." Before Sweet Medicine, the Cheyenne were ruled by cruel soldier societies. These warriors ruled with complete authority, killing those who objected to their decisions. If the Cheyennes were to truly live as "the called out people," political rule by honest and fair men was needed. The chiefs intended to fill this role and promote peace through diplomacy. "Go out and talk to people," instructed Sweet Medicine. "If strangers come, you are the ones to give presents to them and invitations."<sup>131</sup>

Council chiefs served ten-year terms and were selected at large on the basis of their own merit as prominent men within Cheyenne society. Those who exhibited the virtues of generosity, intelligence, evenhandedness, courage, friendliness and wisdom were considered ideal candidates. In theory, chiefs were selected based on their status as prominent men within Cheyenne society, but often nepotism influenced the selection of an outgoing chief's successor, keeping many chieftain titles within prominent Cheyenne families. A Cheyenne male could not hold concurrent memberships with the Council of Forty-Four and the

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<sup>129</sup> Peter Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain; A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 4-5.

<sup>130</sup> A competing story of the Council of Forty-Four's creation exists where a young female Indian refugee teaches the Cheyenne to create chiefs in order to prevent violence within the bands.

<sup>131</sup> John Stands in Timber, *Cheyenne Memories*, 44.

military societies because of their conflicting ideologies. If selected, the male candidate was expected to rescind his membership to his former military society, depart his old military ways, and take up the lifestyle of a council chief.<sup>132</sup>

As the Cheyenne's official tribal institution of government, the Council of Forty-Four exercised little political authority in managing the affairs of their respective bands. The Council met infrequently, convening only in the late spring when the bands of the Cheyenne congregated together to celebrate the Sun Dance, allowing the opportunity for individuals to change band affiliation. While the political autonomy of the council itself was limited, the political influence of council chiefs as leaders of their respective bands was staggering. Council chiefs possessed the final say in matters concerning his band's movement, controlled the buffalo hunt, settled inter-band disputes, and directed the military societies' policing duties. They also were required to uphold a strict moral code originally proscribed by Sweet Medicine and act as a servant for his people, keeping the livelihood of widows and orphans in consideration when making decisions.<sup>133</sup>

The warrior societies were responsible for overseeing two vital facets in Cheyenne life: maintaining order within the bands and engaging in warfare against encroaching adversaries. Membership within warrior societies was comprehensively fluid and members of allied tribes such as the Lakotas and Arapahos could hold membership in a Cheyenne warrior society. Prior to their life on the Great Plains, the Cheyenne possessed only four military societies, the Kit Fox Men, the Elk Warriors or Crooked Lances, the Dog Men and the Red Shields. Two new warrior societies emerged on the Great Plains in the nineteenth century,

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<sup>132</sup> K. N. Llewellyn and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Cheyenne Way; Conflict and Case Law in Primitive Jurisprudence* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941) 73-74; Wooden Leg and Thomas Marquis, *Wooden Leg* (Norman: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 56.

<sup>133</sup> George Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 294; Peter Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 3.

the Bowstrings in 1815 and the Crazy Dog Soldiers in about 1833, evidencing the need for greater defense and military capabilities during this increasingly violent political environment.<sup>134</sup>

Each military society was led by two chiefs, and unlike council chiefs, the office was not constrained by a term limit and instead were “chosen to die.” As leaders of the military societies, warrior chiefs were expected to display the highest degree of courage, rancor, and ferocity on the battlefield, often leading them into dangerous and deadly situations. Not surprisingly, some Cheyenne men did not actively seek the leadership of a warrior society because of the high risk of mortality. However, if an aged military chief recognized that his military acumen was no longer up to par with younger soldiers, he could resign by declaring, “I have become tired” and then appointed a stronger and more skillful warrior to take his place.<sup>135</sup>

## II

In the early nineteenth century, the bands of the Cheyenne tribe collectively established a prudent political philosophy as newcomers to the Great Plains by entering into a political alliance with the Arapahos. As contemporary immigrants to the Great Plains at the end of the eighteenth century, the Cheyennes and Arapahos faced threats from all corners of their territory along the Front Range, and their cross-tribal alliance collective secured their place in this new world. The first goal of the alliance was to gain access to the

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<sup>134</sup> Karen Peterson, “Cheyenne Soldier Societies,” *Plains Anthropologist* 9.25 (August, 1964): 160.

<sup>135</sup> K. N. Llewellyn and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Cheyenne Way*, 99-102.

verdant prairie lands of the Arkansas River Valley. These fertile grasslands provided the ecological basis for bison and horses to prosper, two animals essential to the vitality of an equestrian culture. Such a bountiful source of sustenance and wealth came with a steep price in human life, and the Arapahos and Cheyennes continuously fought the Kiowas and Pawnees for control over the territory. The second goal of the Arapaho-Cheyenne alliance was to combat the Utes, Shoshones and Crows for control over the Front Range of the Rockies. This feat required the assistance of an additional tribe with considerable military clout, the Lakota Sioux. Through allying themselves with the Lakota, the Cheyenne and Arapaho hoped that with the strong military force of this staunch ally on their side they could effectively fend off their enemies to the north and south, securing their prominent position within the horse and firearm trade. Additionally, the military alliance with the Lakotas functioned to avert war with this powerful and expanding tribe. First hand experience from their times in the Middle Missouri River Valley evidenced the military prowess of the Lakotas, and the two tribes keenly elected to become allies with the most powerful actor on the Northern Great Plains.<sup>136</sup>

While the Cheyennes effectively managed macro political relations with the creation of their alliance with the Arapahos and its extension with the Lakota Sioux, conflict on domestic political issues began to grow, particularly between the council chiefs and warrior societies. The underlying cause of this social change was the Cheyennes' commodification of the horse, as the animal quickly became perceived as the extension of an individual. Any economic profit reaped by the use of their horse was deemed to be property of the horse's owner rather than the individual who initiated the effort to utilize the animal. If an individual borrowed an acquaintances' horse for a raid or battle, Cheyenne cultural norms

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<sup>136</sup> John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne*, 91.



declared, "if the rider captured anything during the fight it was the property of the man whose he rode." In the bison hunt, inequalities imposed by the value placed on horse ownership strengthened the preexisting power of the wealthy elder Cheyennes. A well-equipped hunter, possessing both a quality mount and firearm, could kill up to four bison in a single drive. Whereas a hunter of lower social status, who did not possess an efficient rifle or quality horse, would be lucky to kill one buffalo and often returned empty handed. The bounty of the hunt was appropriated to the individual who made the kill, granting control of the resources accrued during the bison hunt to the wealthy Cheyennes who possessed the best horses and firearms. Without access to proper equipment, Cheyennes of lower social status were forced to rely on the generosity of more prominent members of their band for sustenance. Social practices establishing the primacy of ownership subverted the importance of skill in determining an individual's prominence within the tribe, and replacing it with material ownership.<sup>137</sup>

The desire to acquire horse wealth spurred young Cheyenne men to form raiding parties against rival bands at an alarming rate. Prior to the adoption of the horse, the Plains Indians engaged in warfare in the spring. Springtime warfare served as a medium to extract revenge for the death of kin at the hands of enemies when deemed necessary by the family of the kin and to contest control over prime hunting grounds. Raiding imposed an increase of violence in the lives of the Cheyennes, as additional deaths of kin incurred during horse raids spurred the need for the formation of additional revenge parties, systematically perpetuating cycles of violence on the Great Plains prior to extensive interactions with

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<sup>137</sup> "George Bent to George Hyde," September 26, 1905. George Bent Papers, WH1704, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

American settlers. With the added increase of violence brought by horse raiding, the seasons for tribal warfare expanded into the summer and fall.<sup>138</sup>

After decades of intertribal strife and warfare over access to the horse and gun trade, a trans-tribal peace brought a cessation to major conflict between the tribes of the Southern Plains in 1840. The Cheyennes received word from their Arapaho ally Bull that, "The Kiowas and Comanches wish to make peace with you people," and will "give you many horses- horses to the men, and also to the women and children." The next morning the Cheyenne council chiefs and members of the warrior societies congregated in the overflowing big lodge of Seven Bull's at Shawnee Creek south of Bent's Fort to deliberate over the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches' offer for peace. The council chiefs elected to defer this critical matter concerning peace and war to the military societies, who maintained the right to revenge the deaths of their fallen comrades. The two bravest warriors present, White Antelope and Little Old Man of the Dog Soldiers were elected by the Cheyenne assembly to decide the issue of accepting the peace treaty. White Antelope and Little Old Man agreed to accept the outreach for peace and sent runners to relay their desire to council with the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches the next morning "at the mouth of the Two Butte Creek, at the south side of the Arkansas River where the dead timber is so thick," approximately fifty miles south of Bent's Fort.<sup>139</sup> This instance of political cooperation between the warrior societies and council chiefs illustrates the interplay between the two political institutions as well as the fluid nature inherent in Cheyenne political life. The acceptance of the terms of peace by the Dog Soldiers White Antelope and Little Wolf was contrary to the central ethos of their military society and evidences that

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<sup>138</sup> John H Moore, *Cheyenne Political History*, 334.

<sup>139</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 61.

individual Cheyennes often acted contrary to the central axioms of their respective political institutions. With the economic opportunity of strengthening their horse stocks and position within the horse firearm trade, these two Dog Soldiers secured their bands own interests through peace over glory on the battlefield.

The oration of Kiowa Chief Little Mountain evidences that the Southern Plains Tribes' desire to establish peace in order to increase the vibrancy of the continental horse and firearm trade. Speaking on behalf of the Kiowas, Comanches and Apaches, Chief Little Mountain began by instructing the Cheyennes and Arapahos what gifts his people would bestow, and what they expected in return, declaring, "We all of us have many horses; as many as we need; we do not wish to accept any horses as present, but we shall be glad to receive any other gifts." The Kiowas, Comanches and Apaches desired an item much more scarce on the southern plains than in the north, firearms. The Cheyennes and Arapahos maintained contacts with British and American fur traders, granting them a supply of firearms, a luxury the Southern Plains Tribes were rarely afforded as Spanish and later Mexican colonial policy prohibited the trade of firearms to Native peoples.<sup>140</sup>

The following morning the Kiowas, Comanches, Apaches arrived with a large number of horses brought as gifts to cement peace with the Cheyennes. The quantities of horses numbered so great that the Cheyennes did not to bring enough rope to string their new acquisitions back in packs and instead had to herd the horses in bunches. The next day the Kiowas, Comanches, and Kiowas crossed the river dissecting the two Indian camps to receive their reciprocal gifts of firearms. After the Southern Plains Tribes forded the river and were assembled in the camp, Cheyenne chief High Backed Wolf instructed, "Do not be frightened if you hear shots; it is our custom when we are going to give a gun to anyone to

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 62-64.

fire it in the air.” In the following moments, a rapid chorus of the firing of shots roared from the Cheyenne encampment, as the highly coveted firearm gifts were symbolically discharged as they exchanged changed hands, establishing peace through the ceremony.<sup>141</sup>

One final and important provision the treaty of 1840 afforded the Cheyennes and Arapahos was the right to raid New Mexican settlements. The Cheyennes appear to have taken advantage of access of their expanded raiding territories, as Thomas Fitzpatrick recorded in 1847, “Not long since I happened to meet with a party of Cheyennes, thirty-five in number, all young men, all well mounted.” The Cheyenne warrior chief candidly told Fitzpatrick, “they were bound for the frontier settlements of New Mexico for the purpose of plundering the scattering inhabitants.”<sup>142</sup> The Plains Indian peace of 1840 granted the Cheyennes raiding privileges to Spanish settlements provided they uphold their responsibilities of trading highly coveted rifles in return. The Indian peace of 1840 effectively concluded large-scale military engagements between the tribes of the southern Great Plains, although raiding and minor conflicts continued in the years to come.

### III

The intertribal peace of the Southern Plains, however, quickly became antiquated, as the presence of a new people, American settlers, demanded the reorganization of foreign political strategies to account for their encroaching presence. These mysterious newcomers “will be people who do not get tired, but who will keep pushing forward, going, going all the

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<sup>141</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 64.

<sup>142</sup> Joseph Jablow, *The Cheyenne in Plains Indian Trade Relations: 1795-1840* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1951), 76-77.

time,” prophesized Sweet Medicine. “They will travel everywhere, looking for this stone which our great-grand father put on the earth in many places.” It was this insatiable drive to find this “certain stone,” which brought these ever-moving Earth Men and their ideas of power and property into the American West.<sup>143</sup> First, the California Gold Rush brought an influx of American wagon trains that gobbled up scarce caches of lumber and wild game on their trans-continental journey to the Pacific. When gold was “discovered” along the Front Range however, the Earth Men elected to establish colonies in the hunting grounds, pasture lands and trade corridors utilized by the Cheyennes. By year’s end, the first census of Colorado Territory commissioned by territorial governor William Gilpin, revealed that the population of the burgeoning territory had ballooned to 25,329 white citizens.<sup>144</sup> The Earth Men were coming with their new ways and notions of property and power; and as Sweet Medicine predicted, the Cheyenne would be changed forever.

Seeking their own fortune in dire economic circumstances, it was difficult to blame the impulsive move of American settlers from reading newspaper accounts that routinely overemphasized the natural resource wealth of the area. In a letter to the *New York Times*, C.C. Spalding reported that Colorado was abound with “forests of pines, sites for mills, with water power, a rich and extensive country for all branches of agriculture, and the whole region abounded in game.” As for gold, Spalding estimated that he surveyed from \$1,500 to \$1,800 worth of “dust,” nonchalantly scattered across the tables and furniture of the frontiersmen’s cabins. Leading Spalding to conclude, ““Western Kansas possessed more undeveloped wealth than any territory west of the Mississippi,” and “that the Pike’s Peak

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<sup>143</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians: War, Ceremonies and Religion*, Vol. 2 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1923), 377-378.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Maitland Marshall, *Early Records of Gilpin County, Colorado, 1859-1861* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1920), xii.

gold region was no humbug.”<sup>145</sup> Spalding words, reinforced by the writings and advertisements of other capitalist boosters, enticed Americans with little to lose to immigrate to this region, bringing with them Western notions of natural resource ownership and the social structures of power.

The influx of American settlers onto the lands of the Front Range set in motion by Colorado gold rush, placed tremendous strain on the natural resource base of grasses, wood, and bison Cheyennes relied upon. American settlers, accompanied by an entourage of longhorn cattle, began to exhaust the ecotones along the river systems of their precious natural resources of wild game, timber, and fresh grasses. As wild game became increasingly scarce, raiding became an increasingly prevalent alternative means to acquire food and abstract payment from “trespassing” American settlers. Indian Agent J. Winfield remarked, “Nearly every party of emigrants that pass through their country have to pay their way with sugar and coffee.”<sup>146</sup> With the Great Plains no longer able to support the Cheyennes solely through hunting, the Cheyenne increasingly raided American settlers to acquire the food and trade goods they no longer could acquire through the buffalo hunt. Raiding led to more violent interactions with American settlers, increasing tensions between American settlers and the Plains Indians, leading to instances of conflict.

In 1864, a dark shadow of militarization and distrust was cast across the political environment of Colorado Territory. Established American Indian agents were replaced with individuals expected to handle Indian affairs in a militant fashion. John Evans recent appointment as territorial governor of Colorado in 1863 granted him executive authority

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<sup>145</sup> “The Kansas Gold Mines, How to Get to Pike’s Peak, and What you Will Find on Getting There,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1859.

<sup>146</sup> “Report of Indian Agent J. Winfield,” August 29, 1854, U.S. Congress. 33. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Senate Document 1, 303.

over relations with the Plains Tribes. Evans' own political ambition swayed him to adopt a violent, hard-line stance against the Plains Indians. He feared that if he made peace with the Plains Indians he would lose face with Washington politicians who had financed the creation of new Colorado Cavalry regiments. After all, it was Evans own testimony that a military force was "necessary for the protection of the Territory, and to fight hostile Indians" that persuaded Washington politicians to support the creation of a Colorado military force. With Arapaho and Cheyenne headmen counseled to make peace with the United States at Camp Weld in the fall of 1864, Governor Evans could only remark, "What shall I do with the third regiment, if I made peace?" With poor information and untested Indian agents, the United States was inadequately outfitted to deal with Indian relations on the Front Range. Blinded by the partisanship of the Civil War, American agents interpreted all Indians as a collective enemy, paving the way for unnecessary conflict.<sup>147</sup>

The political environment of uncertainty between the Plains Indians and the American settlers was ripe for violence, and the bombastic command of Colonel John Chivington provided the inciting spark. On a cold and brisk morning of November 29, 1864, American soldiers under the command of Colonel Chivington began their descent upon the encampment. Cheyenne George Bent was present at Black Kettle's encampment that apocalyptic morning. Still asleep at the early hour of Chivington's assault, Bent recalled, "I ran out of the lodge and saw the troops charging, one company coming east of the village. The others to the west." Bent gazed upon the activity in the center of the Cheyenne encampment, and "saw Black Kettle had a flag up- fastened to a lodge pole in front of his lodge." Major Wynkoop instructed Black Kettle that the flying of the Union Jack would

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<sup>147</sup> "Testimony of Major Wynkoop," June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1865, U.S. Congress. 39<sup>th</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Senate Report 156, 77.

convey to belligerent whites the peaceful and friendly relations of his people, serving as a deterrent against unnecessary conflict. On this vengeful morning however, even the Union Jack, the flag of the country whose honor Chivington swore his life to defend, failed to sway the genocidal plans of Colonel Chivington, as “soldiers opened fire from all sides,” spilling the first innocent blood into the trickling, half-frozen waters of Sand Creek.<sup>148</sup>

Seeking to escape imminent death, Bent bunkered down in the “sand hills west of the creek” with ten other middle age Cheyennes. Bent and his elders attempted to make a stand against the American advance. “But the fire was too hot for us,” recollected Bent. “So we turned up the creek to join the old men and women who had dug holes to take refuge in, about two miles north of camp.” Their minor retreat to the North failed to procure a more militarily defensible point, for “When we got there we found the people surrounded by soldiers, firing on them and the 2 companies had followed us all the way up, shooting up the creek.”<sup>149</sup> For many Cheyennes, the coarsely dug gravel pits were their final resting place, as many Cheyennes were massacred under the shower of American bullets. Bent recalled that during the battle one Cheyenne man was instantaneously “killed when he jumped out of the hole and ran toward the troops that were converging upon us.” After the unnamed Cheyenne’s death, Bent and council chiefs Spotted Horse and Bear Shield attempted their escape, and Chivington’s troops quickly gunned down both Spotted Horse and Bear Shield, while Bent barely escaping with his own life.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “*George Bent to George Hyde*,” March 14, 1905. George Bent Papers, WH1704, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> “*George Bent to Samuel Tappan*,” February 23, 1889, Samuel Tappan Collection, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.



In the violence that followed, approximately 175 American Indians were massacred. Aghast, Lt James Conner commented on the brutality that occurred during the massacre:

I did not see a body of man, women, or child but scalped, and in many instances their bodies were mutilated in a most horrible manner- men women, and children's privates cut out, & I heard one man say that he had cut out a woman's private parts and had them for exhibition on a stick; I heard another man say that he had cut the fingers off an Indian to get the rings on a hand... I also heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females and stretched them over the saddlebows, and wore them over their hats while riding in the ranks.<sup>151</sup>

After the massacre, the Sand Creek survivors fled from American forces and outposts. Losing most of their horses and material goods in the conflict, simply surviving the winter nights without food and shelter proved to be a perilous and haunting affair. George Bent's words give credence to the utter despair the survivors faced in the wake of the massacre:

It was very dark and cold and those who were not sounded kept up the grass fires. There was no wood. The wounded would have frozen but for fires, for lots of us had no blankets. Some of the wounded had their friends covered them up with grass to keep from freezing. No one slept a wink, all were thinking about what had happened that day and the wounds pained so that Indians kept howling all night, for those that had not come up.<sup>152</sup>

The Sand Creek Massacre resulted in the deaths of eight council chiefs: White Antelope, One Eye, Yellow Wolf, Big Man, Bear Man, War Bonnet, Spotted Crow and Bear Robe. From this devastating loss, not only was the membership of the Council of Forty-Four fundamentally weakened, the perception of the Council of Forty-Four as an effective medium to deal with whites diminished in the eyes of many Cheyennes.

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<sup>151</sup> "Lt. James Conner to Lt. W.P. Minton," January 16, 1865, U. S. Congress. 39<sup>th</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Senate Report 156, 53.

<sup>152</sup> "George Bent to George Hyde," December 21, 1905. George Bent Papers, WH1704, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

Despite the experience of bearing witness to the slaying of scores of kin at Sand Creek, Black Kettle remained steadfast in his desire for peace between his people and the United States. On October 14, 1865, Federal agents met with the Southern Arapahos and Cheyennes seeking to uncover the underlying causes leading up to Sand Creek Massacre, and to broker a new treaty that would safely remove the Cheyennes and Arapahos from the vicinity of Colorado Territory. Black Kettle was the prominent speaker of the bereaved Southern Cheyenne, and the catharsis of his oration elucidates the personal despair and tensions suffered by Black Kettle in attempt to fulfill the requirements of a Cheyenne Council Chief in the wake of such a tragic event:

Your young soldiers I don't think they listen to you. You bring presents, and when I come to get them I am afraid they will strike me before I get away. When I come in to receive presents I take them up crying. Although wrongs have been done to me I live in hopes. I have not got two hearts. These young men, (Cheyennes,) when I call them into a lodge and talk with them, they listen to me and mind what I say. Now we are again together to make peace. My shame (mortification) is as big as the earth. Although I will do what my friends advise me to do. I once thought that I was the only man that preserved to be the friend of the white man, but since they have come and cleaned out (robbed) our lodges, horses, and everything else, it is hard for me to believe white men any more.<sup>153</sup>

Struggling with his own inner conflicts and under pressure from American agents, Black Kettle begrudgingly consented to a new treaty with the United States that ceded all Cheyenne territorial claims to the Front Range. The Southern Cheyennes new reservation was located between the Arkansas River and Cimarron Rivers in Kansas Territory, securing the Southern Cheyenne bands access to the dwindling buffalo herds.<sup>154</sup> The Southern Cheyennes' decision to cede claims from Colorado Territory illustrates the impact of

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<sup>153</sup> "Camp on the Little Arkansas," October 12, 1865, U.S. Congress, 39<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, House Document 1, 704.

<sup>154</sup> *Treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho*, October 14, 1865, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II: Treaties*, 887-89.

American structures of power onto Cheyennes' deliberation of vital political issues. Black Kettle realized that in order for the Cheyenne to maintain their lifestyle of hunting the bison and other wild game, the Cheyennes would need a reservation far from the burgeoning mining cities along the Front Range.

#### IV

While the Southern Cheyennes experienced tragedy at Sand Creek, Northern Cheyenne chiefs achieved greater success in dealing with American settlers by implementing both diplomatic and militant political strategies. With the threat of death and violence becoming a daily occurrence, Cheyenne leaders needed the flexibility to pursue foreign policies of both war and peace. As a result of the increasingly violent political environment post-Sand Creek, the strict dichotomy between the roles of the warrior chiefs and council chiefs began to blur. Northern Cheyenne Wooden Leg recalls:

It often occurred that in time of battle or in organizing great hunting expeditions a tribal big chief or an old man chief had, during such time, the low standing of a mere private person subordinate to the rule of the warrior chiefs. And in many instances some man might be at the same time both a warrior chief and a tribal big chief or even an old man chief. Little Wolf had this honor put upon him. Even after he had become one of the four old men chiefs he was kept in office as leading chief of the Elk warriors.<sup>155</sup>

This new generation of council chiefs, including Two Moons, Little Wolf and Morning Star, broke away from the cultural tradition of advocating peace in all situations, and instead elected to pursue military avenues when deemed prudent for the well being of their respective bands.

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<sup>155</sup> Wooden Leg, 57-58.

The military leadership of this new generation of chiefs was displayed during Red Cloud's War, where the Cheyennes joined their Sioux and Arapaho allies in defense of the Powder River Valley from an American invasion. In the winter of 1866, the Cheyennes fought at Peno Valley in Northern Wyoming during the Fetterman Massacre, known as the "Battle of One Hundred Slain" by its Native combatants. According to the Cheyenne White Elk, the night prior to the assault, "The names of ten young men were called out. There were two Cheyennes, two Arapahoes, and two from each of the three tribes of the Sioux who were present. The two Cheyennes were Little Wolf and Wolf Left Hand."<sup>156</sup> The dangerous mission assigned to the ten warriors was to entice American forces to leave their protected position at Fort Phil Kearny and led them toward a waiting Indian ambush in the surrounding foothills. This diversion allowed mounted Sioux warriors previously hidden from the battlefield in the opposite mountains to flank Fetterman's regiment. Falling into the trap, Fetterman and his soldiers quickly found themselves surrounded by two thousand allied Indians. All of Fetterman's eighty troops were killed in the battle. The corpses of the U.S. Soldiers were found "scalped, stripped and mutilated." One soldier named Beaver met a particularly gruesome end: "they had first stripped him and than filled his body with arrows as they were sticking out of him all over like porcupine quills." sending a direct message to encroaching American settlers to stay out of Indian territory. When American forces agreed to retreat from the vicinity in 1867, it was council and warrior chief Little Wolf who was afforded the honor to burn down the much despised military outpost Fort Phil Kearny.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> George Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 229.

<sup>157</sup> William Curney, *The Forgotten Battalion*, Mark Chapman Collection, Collection 3, Box 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, 9.

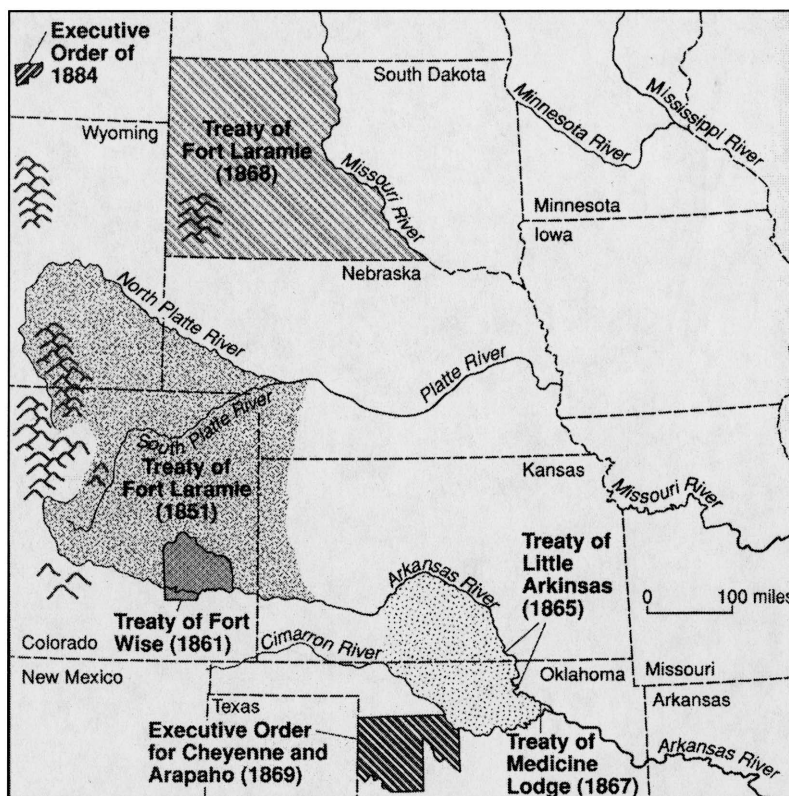


Figure 3.1 Map of Territories Guaranteed to the Cheyennes by their Treaties with the United States.<sup>158</sup>

In the wake of the Civil War, many Americans east of the Mississippi River rescinded their support of military solutions to solving the conflicts with the Plains Indians. Reflecting this weariness with war, in 1867 the U.S. Congress created the Indian Peace Commission to establish new treaties to bring a peaceful end to Red Cloud's War and other conflicts with western tribes. The first stop of this commission was at Medicine Lodge Creek in Western Kansas, where the commission heard grievances from the Comanches, Kiowas, Plains Apaches, and the Southern bands of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes throughout the month of October 1867.

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<sup>158</sup> Map of Territories Guaranteed to the Cheyennes by their Treaties with the United States," Courtesy of John C Moore, *The Cheyenne*.

For the Cheyennes, the Treaty of Medicine Lodge failed to not only end warfare with the United States, it also damaged the Southern bands prospects of maintaining their equestrian lifestyle, as the text of the treaty was embedded with stipulations guiding the tribes to reservation life. In the terms agreed upon at Medicine Lodge, the Cheyennes and Arapahos consented to opening a path for the transcontinental railways and agreed to cease attacks on American caravans and settlers. Most significantly at Medicine Lodge, the Cheyennes and Arapahos ceded four million acres, over half their remaining territory to the United States. In return for these sacrifices, the Cheyennes received basic economic provisions such as “a suit of good, substantial woolen clothing,” and assurances that no whites would impede onto the territories of their contracted reservation. The Cheyennes did manage to secure the right “to hunt on the lands south of the Arkansas River, formerly called theirs, in the same manner as agreed on by the treaty of the “Little Arkansas.” This provision however, came at a high cost as Cheyennes’ ownership of property dwindled as Western conceptions of property and power began their ascent as the hegemonic set of rules over the political space of the Southern Plains.<sup>159</sup>

After concluding negotiations at Medicine Lodge Creek, the envoy of American diplomats traveled north to establish peace with the Sioux, and Northern Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes at Fort Laramie. In the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, the United States agreed to close its military forts along the Bozeman Trail and affirmed Sioux control over the territory of the Great Sioux Reservation. For the Cheyenne, the treaty stipulated the future possibilities for their own reservation, claiming could either live with their kin on the Cheyenne and Arapaho Reservation in Indian Territory present day Oklahoma, or “live in

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<sup>159</sup> *Treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, 1867*, October 28, 1867, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II: Treaties*, 986-989.

some portion of the country and reservation set apart and designated as a permanent home for the Brulé and other bands of Sioux Indians.” The Cheyennes in attendance at Fort Laramie selected the latter and sought to live with their Sioux kin and allies in the ancestral home of Sweet Medicine.<sup>160</sup>

## V

While the Northern Cheyenne achieved a large victory in resisting the militant forces of American expansion, their Southern kin did not share their success in managing relations with the ever-increasing population of American settlers. The words spoken at Medicine Lodge Creek failed to end cycles of violence between the warrior societies and American soldiers, as minor acts of violence routinely escalated into larger conflicts. To quail American aggression, Southern Cheyenne Chief Little Rock met with Colonel Wynkoop to discuss the recent raping and murdering of American settlers committed by a Cheyenne warrior society.

The actions of Little Rock in his meeting with Colonel Wynkoop further evidence the diverging political goals between the warrior societies and remaining council chiefs. In his private meeting with Wynkoop, Little Rock vented the names of Cheyenne warriors suspected to be guilty of raping and killing American settlers. First, “Big Head’s son rode at him and knocked him down with a club,” described Little Rock. Then, White Antelope’s brother, “the Indian who had committed the outrage upon the white woman... fired upon the white man without effect, while the third Indian rode up and killed him.” Little Rock’s

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<sup>160</sup> *Treaty with the Sioux, Brulé, Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonal, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans, Arcs, and Santee- and Arapaho* 1968.

willingness to grant this information to Colonel Wynkoop evidences the lack of solidarity existing between the council chief Little Rock and the warrior societies.<sup>161</sup>

Black Kettle and Little Rocks' efforts to pursue peace were ultimately in vain as both would meet death from American bullets. On the morning of November 27, 1868,, Lt. George D. Custer attacked Black Kettle's encampment on the Washita River in retribution for Dog Soldier attacks against American settlers. Grandson of Chief Black Kettle, Stacy Riggs maintains that the evening before the American General Long Hair assaulted the Cheyenne village at Washita, "Grandfather Gentle Horses, the brother of the chief," was startled from his sleep after dreaming "one of the greatest and most true dreams that a man of good dream ever dream about." Awakening Black Kettle, Gentle Horses reiterated to his brother, "that he had seen a vision of a large black wolf, and whose face was half bloody and mourned as if its little ones had been destroyed by an enemy."<sup>162</sup>

The death and despair predicted by Gentle Horses' vision of the black wolf descended onto the Cheyenne peoples as Custer ordered his forces to assault into the village at the "first dawn of day." Woken by gunfire and screams of terror from their children and relatives, the startled Cheyennes began their defense by taking refuge behind the trees and in the ravines surrounding their encampment. Riggs remembered the final moments of the *Mo'ôhtavetoo'o*, Black Kettle, the Council Chief whose efforts for peace only brought him people bloodshed. "Uncle Barementface said that he was with them when Grandfather try to help his wife on their Iron gray horse but the horses was badly frightened by the great firing and the morning excitement." Seconds after Black Kettle and his wife mounted their

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<sup>161</sup> "Interview between Colonel E. W. Wynkoop and Little Rock," August 19, 1868, U.S. Congress. 40<sup>th</sup>. 3<sup>rd</sup> Session. Senate Document 18, 46-49.

<sup>162</sup> Stacy Riggs, "Story of the Great Cheyenne Chief, Black Kettle, and his last battle with Custer at Washita," January 13, 1910, *The Arapaho Bee*, Don Rickey Papers, WH986, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.



escape horse, “their horse was shot, broken right hind leg, then Grandmother was shot down and then Grandfather.”<sup>163</sup> Cheyenne casualties, counted by Custer as “the Indians left on the ground,” totaled 103 bodies, including council chiefs Little Rock and Black Kettle. Custer’s forces suffered one fifth of the Cheyennes’ losses, with twenty-one American deaths. Adding insult to injury, Custer now possessed fifty-three prisoners of war, including the surviving family members of Little Rock and Black Kettle. Despite their desires to establish peace, Little Rock and Black Kettle only found an environment of war, violence and death.<sup>164</sup>



*Figure 3.2* Cheyenne Survivors of the Washita attack, held under guard at Camp Supply, 1868.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Stacy Riggs, “Story of the Great Cheyenne Chief, Black Kettle.”

<sup>164</sup> “Field Report of General Custer,” 28.

<sup>165</sup> “Cheyenne survivors of the Washita attack, held under guard at Camp Supply, 1868,” Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven: Connecticut.

American settlers and their notions of power and property, cynically predicted by Sweet Medicine to destroy Cheyenne culture, had a particularly disparaging effect on the Southern Cheyenne bands. Their close geographical proximity to American settlements imposed harsh economic and ecological consequences onto the Cheyenne people. American settlers ravaged the natural resources the Cheyennes relied on for sustenance. This economic imposition, combined with an overarching sense of resentment from their experience of ethnic cleansing from the Front Range made a military response against the Americans invaders a rational and justified decision in the opinion of many Cheyennes, particularly the members of the military societies. This rationalization for war was furthered by existing cultural movements as the decentralized structure of power underlying Cheyenne society led many of the warrior societies to attack American settlements on their own initiative.

Other Cheyennes interpreted the violent past as an indication for the need to maintain peaceful relations with the United States. Witnesses to the massacres of their kin along the Washita River and Sand Creek, this second group of Cheyennes perceived the futility in fighting a force whose numbers vastly outnumbered them and utilized brutal military tactics, such as morning raids on civilian encampments and the indiscriminate killing of elders, women and children. These Cheyennes understood that violence against the United States in any shape or form would result in devastating consequences for their people, as American retaliations affected all members of the tribe, not simply the warrior societies.

Thus, the dual threats of degraded ecological conditions and the expansion of American power on the Southern Great Plains, catalyzed both the council chiefs and military societies to concurrently pursue their respective political philosophies of war and peace. For

American agents, the continued assaults by the warrior societies evidenced that the Cheyenne chief, believed to possess a monarchical rule over his tribe, also consented to the violence, and therefore justified targets for to extract retribution. This political dilemma, rationally pitting war against peace created a recipe for recurrent violence with the United States, and was particularly devastating on Cheyenne civilians, demonstrated by the Massacres along the Washita and Sand Creek.

After the Washita Massacre, raids against American settlers by the warrior societies proliferated, and included tactics deemed incomprehensible in the minds of American settlers, the taking and gang raping of women captives. The presence of women hostages was unbearable for Americans conditioned by ideas of the cult of domesticity and became the pretext for future American campaigns against the Cheyennes. On July 11, nearly 244 soldiers guided by fifty Pawnee scouts, attacked Tall Bull's Dog Soldiers at Summit Springs, near Sterling, Colorado, killing fifteen warriors including their chief Tall Bull. The Battle of Summit Springs proved to be the Dog Soldier's final fight for Colorado, as the grasp of American power cemented hold with ability to militarily defend their new claims to property on the Front Range. Although defeated that day, the Dog Soldiers and their Lakota allies continued to fight American soldiers in the coming decade with far greater success.<sup>166</sup>

In 1874, Southern Cheyenne warriors joined a confederation of Plains Indians following the Comanches *I'sâtaí* and Quanah Parker in the War to Save the Buffalo. James Mooney recorded that *I'sâtaí* proclaimed to possess a powerful medicine granting him the ability to "influence the guns of the whites, and particularly of the soldiers, that they would not shoot the Indians, even though the latter stood in front of the muzzles."<sup>167</sup> The first

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<sup>166</sup> Elliott West, *The Contested Plains*, 295-98.

target they selected to destroy was an encampment American buffalo hunters bivouacked at Bent's southern trading fort known as Adobe Walls. According to Mrs. Sarah Pohocsucut, daughter of Comanche Jack, a participant in the battle, "The fighters sang a special song on the way to Adobe Walls. When almost there, they stopped about one half mile away, under a bluff, and Ishitai made his bullet proof medicine, and ordered them all to sing a special song when they attack."<sup>168</sup>

On June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1874, the War for the Buffalo commenced with twenty-eight American bison hunters awakening to sound of the crackle of gunfire at dawn. Now put to the test, *I'sátaí's* medicine promising vulnerability from American bullets proved to be a desperate farce. The Americans at Adobe Walls possessed a defensible position at Adobe Walls, and many of the Buffalo Hunters at Adobe Walls possessed Sharps "Big Fifty" caliber buffalo rifles, allowing Americans to slay the attacking Indians and their horses from hundreds of yards away. These military advantages decided the outcome of the battle and the barrage of American rifles deterred the Plains Indians attack on the fort. It was in this defeat that *I'sátaí* received his current name of "Coyote rectum," for as he ran from the battle, Comanches chastised, "like a Coyote running away, all you could see was his rectum."<sup>169</sup>

The Indians' aggressive assault on Adobe Walls confirmed the opinion of many American property owners, that the Plains Indians needed to be removed to Indian Territory in Oklahoma for the safety of their economic interests. The American Army was ordered to

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<sup>167</sup> James Mooney, *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians*, 201.

<sup>168</sup> Don Rickey, "Interview with Mrs. Sarah Pohocsucut, Daughter of Comanche Jack (Permune)," Lawton, Oklahoma, June 27, 1954, Don Rickey Papers, WH986, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

<sup>169</sup> Don Rickey, "Interview with Ho va rith ka," Faxon, Oklahoma, June 6, 1954, Don Rickey Papers, WH986, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

surround the bands of Plains Indians living off the reservation and slowly constrict their perimeter until all of the bands were retained within the borders of Indian Territory. After suffering a devastating defeat resulting in the complete destruction of their lodges, food and other material goods at Palo Duro Canyon on September 28, 1874, Cheyenne bands began to return to Darlington Reservation. Now constrained on the reservation, the Cheyennes entered a new phase of their colonial relationship with the United States, as they were disarmed of their weapons and forced to send thirty-nine “hostile” Cheyennes to serve prison sentences in Fort Marion, Florida, as a token of their submission. As the thirty-nine prisoners were receiving their shackles, on looking Cheyenne women began singing war songs lamenting the abject imprisoned status of their warriors on April 6, 1875. Invigorated by songs of the women, Dark Horse attempted to make an escape before suffering the shame of imprisonment, a fate worse than death for a Cheyenne warrior. His escape prompted the guards to open fire on the Cheyennes, causing the threatened Cheyenne villagers to flee into the nearby foothills. A standoff between Plains Indians and American soldiers continued well into the night as the Cheyennes armed with their bows and rifles they managed to hide from American agents, fought the American guards until dusk.<sup>170</sup>

After receiving word of the skirmish at Darlington Agency, a small contingent of approximately twenty lodges of Southern Cheyennes led by warrior Little Bull elected to trek north to live with their kin rather than return to the reservation and live at the mercy of American agents. An American battalion under the command of Lt. Henely was commissioned to quickly apprehend the Cheyennes, and with the assistance of nearby bison hunters, Henely located Little Bull’s encampment at Sappa Creek in Northwest Kansas. A terrain described by George Bent, as “a good place to hide but a poor one to defend in a

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<sup>170</sup> George Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 364-366.

fight.” On April 23, 1875, Henely began his surprise attack on the Cheyennes attempting to hide in the creek beds, inflicting heavy casualties on the pinned Cheyennes as the fifty caliber rounds from the buffalo rifles inflicted devastating losses on Little Bull’s Cheyenne. The Cheyennes suffered so heavily that during the onslaught, Little Bull and Dirty Water attempted to parley with the Americans to end the violent affair. At this critical moment however, White Bear shot and killed the American soldier brokering terms with Little Bull and Dirty Water.<sup>171</sup> This shot provoked an unequivocal American response, with soldiers fired indiscriminately at the remaining Cheyennes, quickly cutting down Little Bull and Dirty Water. This assault would conclude the Southern Cheyennes military engagements with the United States, paving their way to reservation life through violence.

## VI

The lives of Northern Cheyennes became steeped in high levels of violence with the outbreak of the Great Sioux War. In 1874, the United States reasserted their desire to control the lands of the Great Sioux Reservation after an expedition under the command of General Custer discovered gold in the Black Hills. Unlike past gold rushes in the American West; American settlers recognized the fight the Lakotas were willing to wage in defense of their sacred homeland, “which they love as we do the home of our childhood.” Yet, according to the *New York Times* the universal opinion amongst Americans is “that a handful of Indians have no right to retard the progress of civilization, and that now, as in the past history of the world, the weaker nation must go to the wall.”<sup>172</sup> The United States

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 368.

government affirmed this sentiment in 1875 by decreeing that the Plains Indians living freely on the Great Sioux Reservation report to their respective agencies, opening a way for gold prospectors and the American military.

“Word was sent to the hunting Indians that all Cheyennes and Sioux must stay on their reservations in Dakota,” recalled Kate Bighead. “But all who stayed on the reservations had their guns and ponies taken from them, so the hunters quit going there.”<sup>172</sup> Veterans of Red Cloud’s War, the Northern Cheyennes and Sioux moved away from the agencies and increased their raids of white settlers, acquiring needed reserves of firearms, horses, food and ammunition for the upcoming conflict. Two Moons’ Cheyennes were the first to encounter American forces under the command of Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds along the Powder River on March 18, 1876. Although the Battle of Powder River was only a minor skirmish, the battle had tremendous political ramifications, as it strengthened the Cheyenne and Lakota alliance. Attacked before their Lakota allies, the Cheyenne understood that they were also clear enemies of the United States, removing the possibility to avert participation in the Great Sioux War.

As winter thawed into spring, the Lakota and Cheyenne bands congregated together along the major waterways of the Tongue, and Little Bighorn Rivers, maximizing their defensive position in preparation for the next American attack. On the morning of June 17, 1876, the Battle of Rosebud commenced with General Crook’s army of nearly 1,050 American soldiers as well as 260 Crow and Shoshone scouts advanced into the valley of Rosebud Creek, where nearly 1500 allied Cheyennes and Lakotas expected their arrival. The

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<sup>172</sup> “The New Gold Region In the Black Hills,” *New York Times*, August 31, 1874.

<sup>173</sup> Kate Bighead and Thomas Marquis, *She Watched Custer’s Last Battle: Her Story Interpreted* (Hardin, Montana: Custer Battle Museum, 1933), 8.

Cheyennes remember the conflict of Rosebud as the “Battle Where the Girl Saved her Brother,” for during the battle a female warrior named Buffalo Calf Road displayed great courage in a gallant rescue of her injured brother during the afternoon apex of the battle. According to Kate Bighead, Buffalo Calf Road “was the only woman who had a gun,” and was outfitted with “a six-shooter and powder, and she fired many shots at the soldiers.”<sup>174</sup> Buffalo Calf Road’s gallant act of bravery inspired the Cheyennes to fight with greater tenacity against Crook’s forces for the remainder of the day. As the hues of dusk settled over the battlefield, the Lakota and Cheyenne warriors accomplishing their goal of deterring Three Star’s forces from advancing onto their villages, and accordingly left the battle field through the surrounding forests. Mirroring their enemy’s movement, Crook’s column also returned to their base-camp, deterred from their goal of quashing the Lakotas and Cheyennes resistance. The battle left ten allied Indian warriors and thirty-six members of Crook’s forces dead, however the true significance underlying the Battle Where the Girl Saved Her Brother was the allied Indians’ prevention of Crook’s army from rendezvousing with General Custer along the Little Big Horn River. This American military blunder imposed devastating consequences in the weeks to come, as General Custer’s force of nearly 600 soldiers would be vastly outnumbered in their attempted to subjugate the Lakotas and Cheyennes packed closely together along the river valleys of their hunting grounds.

Nine days later, the battle of Little Bighorn known as the Battle of Greasy Grass by its Native combatants began on June 25, 1875, with Custer’s cavalry marching toward Cheyenne and Lakota lodges encamped along the banks of the Bighorn. The encampment of Allied Indians along the Greasy Grass numbered in the thousands, with approximately 350 Cheyenne and 1,200 Lakota warriors providing defense. While watering his horses on

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.



the morning of June 25, Cheyenne Chief Two Moons “looked up the Little Horn towards Sitting Bull’s camp. I saw a great dust rising. It looked like a whirlwind.” With the encroaching American Cavalry in sight, a malaise abounded across the Cheyenne encampment. Bringing order to the situation, Two Moons called out “I am Two Moon, your chief. Don’t run away. Stay here and fight. You must stay and fight the white soldiers I shall stay even if I am to be killed.” With the assurance of one of their esteemed council chiefs, Two Moons and the rest of the Cheyenne men mounted their horses and prepared their minds and bodies for battle.<sup>175</sup>

Mounted on horseback, the Cheyenne and Lakota soldiers began to circle around the outnumbered American forces “swirling like water around a stone. We shoot, we ride fast, we shoot again.” The Cheyenne and Sioux warriors aimed for the mounts of their adversaries rather than going for a difficult kill shot. The fall off a wounded horse often badly wounded or killed the rider. If the rider survived his fall, the Plains Indians realized that without their horse, the combatant was effectively marginalized and could be cut down by faster cavalry. From this ingenious strategy, soon only five mounted American Cavalry remained. The remaining American forces “stood on a hill and bunched together,” infamously known as Custer’s Last Stand. Two Moons recollects that in the midst of the battle’s climax, “A chief was killed,” believed to be “Long Hair,” General Custer himself. After the loss of their general, chaos ensued among the remaining American forces, as “the bunch of men, may be so forty” fled in retreat toward the Little Big Horn River. The rifles

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<sup>175</sup> H Garland, “General Custer’s Last Fight as Seen by Two Moon,” *McClure’s Magazine* Vol. 6 (May to Oct., 1898): 446.

of the Cheyenne and Sioux echoed in a deadly chorus, inflicting death onto the retreating remnants of the fleeing American force.<sup>176</sup>

The next morning Cheyenne and Sioux gathered willow branches from the banks of the Greasy Grass to begin their count of the dead. There would be no mercy for injured American soldiers who survived the night. Two Moons reminisced, "Some white soldiers were cut with knives to make sure they were dead; and the war women had mangled some." General Custer represented only one of the 388 willow branches counted that day, also included in the fatality count were thirty-nine Sioux and seven Cheyennes.<sup>177</sup>

Despite their great allied victory and desecration of Custer's forces, the Cheyenne and Sioux contingents were in no mood to celebrate. They were well aware that more American forces would be on their way to attempt to destroy their peoples. In a somber mood, the bands of the Sioux and Cheyenne broke apart to prepare for this oncoming invasion of American troops. The Cheyenne under Two Moons went south, traveling down the Greasy Grass River into the Rotten Valley, and Sitting Bull's band of Sioux headed north to the Canadian border.

While Two Moons band experienced a colossal allied Native victory over the United States, their relatives under the leadership of Little Wolf and Morning Star did not share their fortunes, as both suffered a devastating defeat at the Battle of Bates Creek, commonly known as the Dull Knife Fight. On November 24, 1876, American forces located the encampment of Little Wolf and Morning Star near a small creek along the banks of the Tongue River in Wyoming Territory. Ranald Mackenzie possessed a force nearly double the Strength of Custer's recently vanquished regiment, with 600 soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 448.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

accompanied by 400 Crow, Pawnee, Shoshone and Arapaho scouts. After the Indian scouts located the Cheyenne encampment, Mackenzie ordered his forces to move quickly through the night seeking to attack “in the earliest hours of the morning, taking the enemy completely by surprise.” MacKenzie accomplished his initial objective of isolating the Cheyennes from their horses, and the battle commenced with the Cheyenne seeking cover in the high grounds of the foothills, stranded from their horses.<sup>178</sup>

Beaver Heart remembers awakening to the panic in the Cheyenne camp at the onset of Mackenzie’s dawn assault. “Soldiers everywhere. There is no time to snatch up even a robe. Pawnees and Shoshonis shoot at me. Many of my people dead. Others run with me.”<sup>179</sup> Caught off guard the Cheyenne encampment organized an impromptu retreat as the Cheyenne warriors counteracted Mackenzie’s, providing cover and time for the women, children and elders to escape into the surrounding mountains. Iron Teeth remembered, “They killed our men, women and children, whichever ones might be hit by their bullets.” And in the aftermath, “From the hilltops we Cheyennes saw our lodges and everything in them burned.”<sup>180</sup>

Morning Star’s and Little Wolf’s Cheyenne suffered a devastating blow at the hands of Mackenzie’s forces as forty Cheyennes were killed and most of the band’s horses lost. The American soldiers and Indian scouts set the encampment ablaze, and soon the entire encampment transformed into a fiery funeral pyre. “How many tons of buffalo-meat were consumed, I couldn’t pretend to say,” recollected Bourke. “We didn’t stop to estimate its

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<sup>178</sup> John G. Bourke, *Mackenzie’s Last Fight with The Cheyennes; A Winter Campaign in Wyoming and Montana* (New York: The Military Service Institution, 1890), 20-23.

<sup>179</sup> Beaver Heart and Jack Keenan, “They Fought Crook and Custer,” Wyoming Works Projects Administration, Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

<sup>180</sup> Iron Teeth and Thomas Marquis, “Red Ripe’s Squaw Recollections of a Long Life,” *Century Magazine*, CXVIII (June, 1929): 206.

amount, but promptly tossed it in alongside of blazing saddles and streaming fat, to add its quota of crackling noise to the detonation of bursting ammunition.”<sup>181</sup> With only the material goods and horses they managed to recover in the chaos of Mackenzie’s attack, the Northern Cheyennes found themselves in a destitute situation, as the cold, frostbitten winds of the cold Montana winter bit into their bodies.



*Figure 3.3 Little Wolf and Morning Star, 1873.*<sup>182</sup>

Cheyenne Iron Teeth remembered the disparity facing her people in the bitter winter days following the Dull Knife Fight. “We wallowed through the mountain snows for several days. Most of us were afoot,” she recalled. “We had no lodges, only a few blankets, and there was only a little dry meat food among us. Men died of wounds, women and

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<sup>181</sup> Bourke, 29.

<sup>182</sup> “Little Wolf and Morning Star,” Photograph by Alexander Gardner, 1873. Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society.

children froze to death.”<sup>183</sup> Cheyenne scouts managed to recover approximately seventy-five of their horses through a counter-raid against the Pawnee scouts. Without food or shelter, these horses saved the lives of many Cheyennes as the animals were slaughtered as a supply of meat, and more importantly as sources of warmth for freezing children, who according to Beaver Heart, were “warmed back to life by stuffing them into the stomachs of butchered horses.”<sup>184</sup> After eleven days of weathering the frostbitten winter winds, the suffering of the decrepit Cheyennes was finally alleviated after encountering Two Moons’ band. Wooden Leg recalled traveling eastward on the Tongue River when his scouts caught site of the strange group of travelers. “We watched and wondered. Who were these people?” After recognizing the distressed travelers as fellow Cheyenne, Wooden Leg’s band rapidly worked to alleviate the suffering of their famished and half-frozen relatives by guiding Little Wolf and Morning Star’s bands to Crazy Horse’s encampment further along the Tongue River. There, the Cheyennes received great hospitality and assistance from their Oglala allies, and were outfitted with, “a new supply of meat and many more skins for enlarging their lodges.”<sup>185</sup>

The winter moons of 1876 and 1877 proved to be strenuous and trying times for the allied Indians remaining in a state of war against the United States. On January 8, 1877, a regiment of miles infantry led by Lt. Frank Baldwin, attacked an allied encampment of Two Moons and Crazy Horse at Hanging Woman Creek, a tributary of the Red Water River in the Battle of Wolf Mountain. Baldwin’s midday attack caught the Cheyennes and Lakotas off guard, as the two bands were in the process of breaking camp. In the confusion,

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<sup>183</sup> Iron Teeth and Thomas B Marquis, “Red Ripe’s Squaw,” 206.

<sup>184</sup> Beaver Heart and Jack Keenan, “They Fought Crook and Custer,” 14.

<sup>185</sup> Wooden Leg, 286-289.

Baldwin captured nine Cheyenne women and children, including elder Sweet Taste Woman, who would later play a critical role as an intermediary in facilitating peace between the Cheyennes and General Miles. The ability of American forces to continuously assault Indian villages throughout the winter months astounded many of the Cheyennes and Lakotas. For the Plains Indians, winter brought a cessation to military violence, because without the lush pasture lands of the spring and summer Great Plains their horses became too weak and lean to ride into battle. In his memoirs, Miles admitted, “the only way to make the country tenable to us was to render it untenable for the Indians.”<sup>186</sup> He acted on this policy by implementing the harsh but efficient American military policy of total warfare against American Indians, and burned the Indian village and its remaining food and supplies. For many Cheyennes, the Battle of Wolf Mountain instructed the lesson that the American army was willing and able to pursue and attack Cheyenne settlements, despite their position or time of year.

As the shadows of night descended across Wolf Mountain, Kate Bighead recalled, “some of our Cheyenne wolf warriors- what the white people call scouts- heard an Indian woman singing in the soldier camp.” The lyrics of the mysterious song relayed advice from the women taken captive during Lt. Baldwin’s assault. The female Cheyenne voice orated, “Get ready to go with the soldiers. There are too many of them for you to fight. They are treating us well.” This message codified in song was not the only critical act of diplomacy engaged in by this Cheyenne woman under the control of General Miles. Later that Spring, the Northern Cheyennes encamped along the Greasy Grass were visited by the Cheyenne tribal elder Sweet Taste Woman, wife of prominent warrior White Bull and one of the

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<sup>186</sup> Nelson Appleton Miles, Marion Perry Maus and Frederic Remington, *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles...* (Chicago: The Werner Company, 1896), 218.

women taken captive by Miles. Serving as a cross-culture political emissary, Sweet Taste Woman brought words of peace and fair treatment from Bear Shirt (General Miles), accompanied by gifts of sugar, coffee, bacon, beans, and most importantly tobacco, the plant synonymous with establishing peace amongst the Plains Indians to reiterate his resoluteness to end war with the Cheyennes. After the gifts from Bear Shirt were distributed, Sweet Taste Woman, tired of watching her people suffer, urged her people to consider ending hostilities with General Miles. Declaring, "that all people who would surrender to Bear Shirt would be treated kindly." She continued by describing her own amicable experience living under General Miles, conveying, "that she and the other captives had been well ... (sic) for. They had been given a tent for themselves, and soldier guards kept them from being bothered by anybody." The gifts and testament conveyed by Sweet Taste Woman had a tremendous impact on many of the Northern Cheyennes after the Battle of Wolf Mountain. "Some of our people started right away to go to Bear Shirt's soldier houses (Fort Keogh) at the mouth of Tongue River. White Bull, my elder brother, went with them," recalled Kate Bighead. Guided by the words of Sweet Taste Women, many Northern Cheyennes under the leadership of Chief Two Moons embarked for Fort Keogh.<sup>187</sup> Stemming from the agency of Sweet Taste Woman, Two Moons was able to use the threat of continued military interests to secure his band's interest of resisting relocation to reside permanently in the north.

Cheyenne oral history maintains that Miles's magnanimity in the favorable terms for peace with the Cheyennes stems from his indebtedness to White Bull, husband of Sweet Taste Woman for saving his life. Previously, White Bull misdirected a booby-trapped surrendered gun, intended to kill Miles as he inspected it. In gratitude, Miles declared he

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<sup>187</sup> Kate Bighead and Thomas Marquis, *She Watched Custer's Last Battle*, 8.

would give the Cheyennes anything they ask for. White Bull replied, "Promise me you will let us live on this land and not make us leave," to which Miles agreed.<sup>188</sup>

Twos Moons' band used this existing relationship with General Miles to ensure they would remain in Montana territory after the conclusion of the Great Sioux War. Miles offered Two Moons and the warriors of his band scout positions for his army, and Two Moons prudently accepted the offer. Although the United States Government officially classified Two Moons' Cheyennes as prisoners of war, the Cheyennes did not identify themselves as such, nor did Miles treat Two Moons' Cheyennes as prisoners. Contrarily, Miles encouraged the Cheyennes to establish their own encampment away from the fort. There, Cheyennes began to plant crops as they previously had a century earlier in the Dakotas, much to the pleasure of American officials who recognized the development as an indicator of the Two Moons' Cheyennes becoming "civilized." From the personal alliance with General Miles, Two Moons Cheyennes were able to live in their homeland, despite efforts of the American government to move all Cheyennes to Indian Territory.<sup>189</sup> Two Moons' success in achieving Cheyenne aims originates in his pursuit of avenues of war and peace. Without military resistance, Miles would have likely never attempted to offer the Two Moons' Cheyennes such generous terms of peace.

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<sup>188</sup> Christina Gish Berndt, *Kinship As Strategic Political Action: The Northern Cheyenne Response to the Imposition of the Nation-State*, PhD Thesis, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), 146-147.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 146.



## VII

The following spring, Little Wolf's Cheyennes agreed to terms of peace with General Crook at Fort Robinson Nebraska, leading to a future quite different than Two Moons' band. General Crook offered them an ultimatum: they could live with the Shoshones and Arapahos at Fort Washakie, travel south to live with the Southern Cheyennes, or temporarily stay at Fort Robinson. Most of the Cheyennes in council wished to stay and live at Fort Robinson, in the vicinity of their traditional hunting grounds. Standing Elk, a distinguished orator and friendly with Americans, was elected to deliver his people's decision that they that would not accept reallocating to the south. To the shock of many Cheyennes in attendance, Standing Elk neglected the pre-established consensus and agreed to the American plan for the relocation of his people to the south. Seventy days later, the Northern and Southern Cheyenne were reunited, much to the chagrin of many Northern Cheyennes who wished to live near the traditional home of Sweet Medicine.<sup>190</sup>

When Little Wolf and Morning Stars' bands arrived at the Southern Cheyenne Agency near Fort Reno in Indian Territory they were disheartened and disappointed by their new surroundings. "As soon as we arrived at the agency," described Northern Cheyenne Wild Hog, "we began to see things were not as they had been represented to us. The climate was much hotter than in the north, and the woods were full of mosquitoes and bugs." Indian Territory was "not full of game, as we had been told we should find it." From these non-ideal conditions in the south and subsequent death of fifty Cheyennes

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<sup>190</sup> John Bourke, *The Diaries of John Gregory Bourke*, Vol. 2, (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas, 2003), 273; Peter Powell, *Sweet Medicine*, 195.

from a fever, Wild Hog longed to return to their home, “where the climate was cooler, the air purer and healthier, and the water sweeter and better.”<sup>191</sup>

A year and nine days after their arrival in Indian Territory, on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1878 Cheyennes under the leadership of Morning Star, Little Wolf and Wild Hog began their exodus north to their traditional homeland. During the night, small groups of Cheyennes began breaking off from the Darlington Agency, riding their horses as fast and as far as possible under the cover of night. Nearly 350 Cheyennes escaped from Indian Territory that evening. To confuse their American Indian agents at Darlington Agency, the Cheyennes keenly left their teepees standing and lodge fires ablaze, setting a diversion that would buy time for their escape.<sup>192</sup>

Violent interactions dominated the Cheyennes’ trek north, and Little Wolf and Morning Star’s bands directly engaged U.S. military forces at the Battle of Turkey Springs in Oklahoma Territory on September 10<sup>th</sup> 1878, and eight days later the Battle of Punished Woman’s Fork in Kansas Territory. In turn, the Cheyennes intensified the violence in their raids of American settlements for food, animals, and weapons, slaying American settlers in the process. After weeks of traveling together and numerous battles with American soldiers Morning Star and Little Wolf’s bands elected to part ways in late October. Morning Star’s band heading east to live with his Lakota allies and kin at the Red Cloud Agency, while Little Wolf’s people continued north to return to their preferred hunting grounds in the lands of Montana.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> “Testimony of Wild Hog,” August 12, 1879, April 2, 1879, U. S. Congress. 46<sup>th</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Senate Report 708, 3.

<sup>192</sup> Stan Hoig, *Perilous Pursuit: The U.S. Cavalry and the Northern Cheyennes* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 53-55.

<sup>193</sup> John Stands in Timber, 234.



up only a few old guns and revolvers” to Captain Johnson moments earlier. Only after Johnson summoned his threatening artillery cannons did the Cheyennes consent to his demand of traveling to Fort Robinson.<sup>195</sup>

Morning Star’s band initially maintained peaceful and amicable relations with the American soldiers stationed at Fort Robinson. Women were allowed to walk freely within the fort, going in and out of the barracks without escort, and often guards cordially smoked with the Cheyenne men inside their barrack confines. After a month of this house arrest setting, General Wessells, the commanding officer at Fort Robinson, received orders from General Sheridan to escort the Cheyenne back to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. Upon catching word of the orders Little Wolf declared, “Great Grandfather sends death in that letter. You will have to kill us and take our bodies back down that trail. We will not go.” Little Wolf’s stern words fostered a great tension between the Cheyennes and the American guards, resulting in a skirmish between an American guard and Wild Hog and a knife stabbed in Wild Hog’s abdomen. In response, the Cheyennes rushed into the barracks and locked themselves in, ensuring the Americans would not be able remove them to the south. Wessells promptly ordered that all rations be cut off to his prisoners until they relinquished their protest.<sup>196</sup>

The Cheyennes did not intend to stay prisoners to the United States for long. On the eve of January 9, 1879, Starving Elk began singing a harrowing song lamenting his current status as a prisoner. Starving Elk’s song signaled the beginning of the Cheyennes’ plan to break free from their imprisonment at Fort Robinson, and with only the small amount of rifles the Cheyenne managed to hide from Wessells; the Cheyenne began their

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<sup>195</sup> *New York Times*, October 27, 1878.

<sup>196</sup> John Stands in Timber, *Cheyenne Memories*, 235.

breakout. Wessells recalled, the Cheyennes “tried to rush the barracks and to get guns and arrows within, but the men were too quick for them.” The conditions of that fateful evening were not ideal for an escape as “it was a bright night with the full moon, and snow on the ground,” making it easy for Wessells’ forces to identify and shoot the rebelling Cheyennes. Despite the clear conditions, Morning Star’s band fought tenaciously through the night. The next morning, Wessells uncovered “a scattering of men, 26 lying dead” within the fort’s confines. Half of the Morning Star’s warriors lay dead in the snow, including his own brother. Sixty-five Cheyennes remained in Wessells’ possession, mostly women and children. Despite the losses of human life, a small group of approximately thirty Cheyennes including their leader Morning Star managed to escape from the fort, and proceeded north to Red Cloud’s agency.<sup>197</sup>

While Morning Star’s band was confined at Fort Robinson, Little Wolf’s band elected to spend the winter hunting deer and antelope and hiding from American forces in the Sand Hills of Nebraska. After January passed, Little Wolf’s people set on the trail toward the Powder River Valley. When Little Wolf’s band reached the Yellowstone River, the 5th and 2<sup>nd</sup> regiments of the American Cavalry were again trailing their path. Expecting a military attack, Little Wolf’s people were pleasantly surprised when the Indian scouts appeared to be their kin Chief Two Moons and Brave Wolf. Chiefs Two Moons and Brave Wolf carried word to Little Wolf Lt. Clark’s ultimatum for peace. If Little Wolf’s band surrendered their rifles and horses, Clark could promise their safety. Little Wolf responded, “Since I left you at Red Cloud we have been south and suffered a great deal down there. Our hearts looked and longed for this country where we were born. There are only a few of us left, and we want a

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<sup>197</sup> General Henry Wessells, “The Cheyenne Outbreak” January 13, 1912, Robert S. Ellison, Walter M. Camp Papers, WH1702, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

little ground, where we could live.” Receiving assurances to his safety, and ability to live with Two Moons people, Little Wolf consented to the peace conditions set by Lt. Clark and preceded to Fort Keogh, Montana.<sup>198</sup> Without the use of violence, the opportunity to live in the north would have never have been presented to Morning Star’s people. Again the use of violence, enticed American agents to offer more generous diplomatic terms for the Cheyennes, allowing the band to achieve their goals of permanently residing in the north.

At Fort Keogh, Little Wolf and his warriors enlisted as scouts in Miles’ army. In gratitude, Little Wolf was granted the right by the United States government to remain in Montana. The prudent political approach of utilizing both methods of peace and warfare to achieve political aims garnered results for the Cheyenne chiefs Little Wolf, Morning Star and Two Moons. In 1884, President Chester A. Arthur created the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation along the lands of the Tongue River Valley in Southeastern Montana by executive declaration. Today Cheyennes remember the personal sacrifices of the generation whose efforts worked to establish the reservation in their traditional hunting lands through a commemorative song, a musical medium that had directed their people in times of strife throughout the nineteenth century:

*Long ago the camp was moved. It was moved to Oklahoma. People started to be sick and there was hunger. Where they had come from the buffalos were still plentiful  
The old men and the young men remembered them.  
They wanted to go back home. The soldiers didn’t agree.  
But they left anyway. The soldiers pursued them as they came back.  
They didn’t overtake them until they arrived back  
The soldiers made peace with them. That’s why here we live. This land, we own it.<sup>199</sup>*

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<sup>198</sup> Lt. W. P. Clark, “Report of Pursuit and Capture of Little Wolf’s Band,” April 2, 1879, U. S. Congress. 46<sup>th</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Senate Report 708, 247.

<sup>199</sup> Ralph Redfox, “The Trek from Oklahoma,” ed. Wayne Leman in *Cheyenne Texts an Introduction to Cheyenne Literature* (Greely, Colorado: University of Northern Colorado, 1980), 9.

## VIII

As Sweet Medicine predicted, the nineteenth century would be a perilous period in the history of the Cheyenne peoples. The introduction of the “slick backed animal” initially afforded great economic benefits through an expansion of trade and access to large herds of wild game. Yet, the acquisition of the horse created a host of new socio-political problems. Domestically, the horse developed into the signifier of social prominence within Cheyenne society. As horse wealth became the measure of an individual’s status, young men aspired to form raiding parties to acquire their own horse herds as well as to demonstrate their battlefield acumen as a warrior. This historical development increased instances of violence in the lives of Cheyenne bands, as raiding parties spurred counter-raids and revenge parties seeking retribution for the death of kin. The horse also complicated foreign affairs, as the younger warrior societies and older council chiefs often entered into disagreement whether a raiding party should be formed because of the risk of retaliation and counter raids it inherently imposed. The horse, the animal affording the Cheyennes their life as equestrian people, caused Cheyenne individuals to rearrange their intertribal social relationships, resulting in an increase of internal political conflict and violent encounters with foreign groups.

The Americans’ economic system of capitalism, predicated on the inalienable right of private property ownership, could not effectively function with the ongoing raids of their property and settlements engaged in by the Cheyennes and other Plains Indians. As equestrian people, raiding was a central economic tenant to the Cheyenne’s mode of economic production and inevitably incurred conflicts with rival neighbors. The decentralized power structure underlying the band structures of Plains Indian life limited the

size and scope of violent interactions incurred by the formation of war parties formed to revenge the death of a kin, aimed at a particular band instead of a larger group. Contrarily, the power structures underlying American life were centered in hierarchy and racism. And when an Indian killed an American citizen, the United States often retaliated by targeting all members of the corresponding tribal group. These competing historical movements of ecological stress and expanding American power forced the Cheyennes to face a difficult political dilemma, where even rational choices resulted in great loss and bloodshed.

Facing these daunting challenges after the loss of the *Maabotse*, Cheyenne council chiefs realized they needed to adopt new political philosophies to achieve tangible results for their people in this transforming world. The experiences of Black Kettle and Little Rock illustrate that relying simply on diplomatic measures in an increasingly violent political environment dominated by warfare was inherently risky, as it placed the future of the Cheyennes in the hands of your adversary. The Northern Cheyenne council chiefs Little Wolf, Two Moons, and Morning Star were successful in achieving their political ambitions by keeping warfare a viable option when dealing with the United States Army. To cope with the increasingly violent world of the nineteenth century Great Plains, military chiefs began to ascend to the position of council chief without rescinding their membership in the warrior societies. Without the constrictions of adhering to either the political philosophy of war or peace, council chiefs could now effectively pursue multiple avenues to achieve Cheyenne political interests. Little Wolf is the prototypical example of the concurrent military and council chief, serving as both the Sweet Medicine Council Chief and as the chief of the Elk Warriors throughout the 1870s. Little Wolf possessed the political acumen unlike previous council chiefs the Cheyennes could remember. Wooden Leg reminisced:



If during his time any Cheyenne was looked upon as the brave man of all, he was the man. He never was afraid to speak the truth. The people all believed him. He was gentle and charitable, but if insulted to anger, he would lash out in quick act of rage.<sup>200</sup>

Wooden Leg's account of Chief Little Wolf exemplifies the traits of both Cheyenne council and warrior chiefs. Little Wolf spoke honestly and was generous, traits associated with the council chief who valued the well being of his band before himself. Yet, at the same time he was quick to embrace acts of violence and renown for his bravery on the battlefield. This amalgam of political acumen was ideal for dealing with American soldiers and Native adversaries in the violent nineteenth century. Consenting to acts of violence alleviated the social tensions initiated by the desire for horse wealth, as now the older council chiefs no longer opposed the social interests of the younger men of the warrior societies. An option of violence also increased the credibility of council chiefs, as Americans well understood from personal experience that the Cheyennes would indeed fight them in battles where American defeat always remained a possibility. On the nineteenth century Great Plains, violence was a mainstay in the lives of the Cheyenne people, and their political structures adapted accordingly to insure the survival of "The Called out People."

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<sup>200</sup> Wooden Leg, 50.

## Conclusion

On June 25, 2007, nearly two hundred American Indians from the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Sioux tribes congregated together along the banks of the Little Big Horn River to commemorate a historic victory won by their ancestors as well as to renew an old political alliance for the challenges of a new century. The date marked the 131<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the historic victory of their ancestors over the invading forces of General George Custer's Seventh Cavalry, and was marked by a new political declaration, adding an additional level of meaning to the historic anniversary. During the festivities, John Yellow Bird Steele, President of the Oglala Sioux, issued an executive proclamation declaring the date as "Traditional Alliance Day," a day of remembrance commemorating the actions of the allied tribes in their defense of the Great Sioux Reservation. President Yellow Bird Steele's new day of remembrance sought to intertwine the significance of the three tribes' allied resistance against the invasion of their northern lands from American expansion with contemporary legal battles over ownership and control of sacred geographies, such as Bear Butte, Deer Medicine Rocks, and the battlefields of their fallen ancestors.

"Our allied nations have always had a connection with the land we lived on," remarked Lakota elder Russell Eagle Bear. "We always had a shared interest to revere sacred sites like Bear Butte, the Deer Medicine Rocks and where Crazy Horse had his vision.

But we also understood the importance of sites where people died like the Rosebud Battlefield, the Battle of Wolf Mountains, and this site, the Little Bighorn.”

Northern Cheyenne Tribal President Eugene Little Coyote concurred with the sentiments of Russell Eagle Bear, orating:

History has shown that when the traditional allied nations of the Cheyenne, Lakota and Arapaho people are unified and work together, we can never be defeated. Today our people continue to fight battles to protect our inherent sovereign rights, our rights as indigenous people, and our human rights. We will rekindle this alliance to protect the sanctity of a shared sacred mountain. This mountain is Noavose to the Cheyenne, Mato Paha to the Lakota, but is commonly known as Bear Butte.<sup>201</sup>

Cheyenne Tribal President Little Coyote was correct to realize that when the Plains Indians ally together, they achieve astounding accomplishments, such as defeating a colonial power on numerous occasions. Yet, as the three peoples look to rekindle their ancestors' alliance to achieve tribal sovereignty over geographies of spiritual and cultural significance, it is important to remember the experiences of the Arapahos and Cheyennes in their colonial relationship with the United States in instances off the battlefield. While the Arapahos and Cheyennes elected to confront American colonialism through different political approaches centered in their respective cultural systems of socio-political organization, the two tribes shared a central enemy in the authoritative, hierarchical structure of power underlying American society. To combat the American structures of power attempting to assimilate and control their lives, the Arapahos manipulated American expectations by claiming their desire to become “civilized,” while surreptitiously creating their own future centered in assimilating new technologies, customs, ideas and systems of production conducive with the values of their existing culture. The Cheyennes combated American power by allowing Council Chiefs greater flexibility to pursue avenues of either peace or war, allowing

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<sup>201</sup> *Indian Country Today*, June 25, 2007.

Cheyenne leaders the ability use the threat of violence in brokering peace with the United States.

It is exactly the structures of power of colonialization confronted by the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples in the nineteenth century that modern Americans must change to end the colonial legacy plaguing tribal communities. As this history has evidenced, the colonial relationship between the United States and Arapahos and Cheyennes was riven with failed promises and conflict, dispossessing Native peoples of both their civil rights as Americans and their reserved rights as members of Tribal Nations. The return of *Nova Rose* to the control of Native peoples, although largely a symbolic transfer for Euro-Americans, would certainly work to establish a new discourse on issues still plaguing American Indians stemming from American colonialism in the twenty-first century, such as poverty, poor health care, and access to quality education. In time, this discourse could galvanize a dramatic change in American perceptions of American Indians, functioning to reorganize American society and power structures into a new relationship with American Tribes centered in mutual respect and the equality of all peoples, rather than rooted in colonialism.

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