

Crazy Horse

When I think back of the stories that I have heard about how the Native American Indians were driven from their land and forced to live on the reservations one particular event comes to my mind. That event is the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It is one of the few times that the Oglala Sioux made history with them being the ones who left the battlefield as winners. When stories are told, or when the media dares to tamper with history, it is usually the American Indians who are looked upon as the bad guys. They are portrayed as savages who spent their time raiding wagon trains and scalping the white settlers just for fun. The media has lead us to believe that the American government was forced to take the land from these savage Indians. We should put the blame where it belongs, on the U.S. Government who lied, cheated, and stole from the Oglala forcing Crazy Horse, the great war chief, and many other leaders to surrender their nation in order to save the lives of their people.

In the nineteenth century the most dominant nation in the western plains was the Sioux Nation. This nation was divided into seven tribes: Oglala's, Brule', Minneconjou, Hunkpapa, No Bow, Two Kettle, and the Blackfoot. Of these tribes they had different band. The Hunkpatila was one band of the Oglala's (Guttmacher 12). One of the greatest war chiefs of all times came from this band. His name was Crazy Horse.

Crazy Horse was not given this name, on his birth date in the fall of 1841. He was born of his father, Crazy Horse an Oglala holy man, and his mother a sister of a Brule' warrior, Spotted Tail. As the boy grew older his hair was wavy so his people gave him the nickname of Curly (Guttmacher 23). He was to go by Curly until the summer of 1858, after a battle with the Arapaho's. Curly's brave charged against the Arapaho's led his father to give Curly the name Crazy Horse. This was the name of his father and of many fathers before him (Guttmacher 47).

In the 1850's, the country where the Sioux Nation lived, was being invaded by the white settlers. This was upsetting for many of the tribes. They did not understand the ways of the whites. When the whites tore into the land with plows and hunted the sacred buffalo just for the hides this went against the morale and religious beliefs of the Sioux. The white government began to build forts. In 1851, Fort Laramie was built along the North Platte river in Sioux territory (Matthiessen 6)

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In 1851, the settlers began complaining of the Indians who would not allow them to go where they wanted. U.S. Agents drew up a treaty that required the Indians to give safe passage to the white settlers along the Oregon Trail. In return the government promised yearly supplies of guns, ammunition, flour, sugar, coffee, tobacco, blankets, and bacon. These supplies were to be provided for fifty-five years. Ten thousand Sioux gathered at the fort to listen to the words of the

white government and to be showered with gifts. In addition the treaty wanted the Indians to allow all settlers to cross their lands. They were to divide the plains into separate territories and each tribe was not to cross the border of their territory. The treaty also wanted no wars to be waged on other tribes. They wanted each Indian nation to choose a leader that would speak for the entire nation. Many Indians did not like this treaty and only after weeks of bribery did the whites finally convince a sizable group of leaders to sign. The Oglala's were among those who refused (Matthiessen 6).

This Treaty however did not stop the trouble between the Indians and the settlers. The Indians however, did not cause violent trouble, they would perhaps approach a covered wagon to trade or extract gifts of food. The most daring warrior might make away with a metal pot or pan but nothing violent like the books and movies lead us to believe (Matthiessen 7).

The straw that broke the camels back took place on August 17, 1854 when the relations between the Indians and Whites were shattered. Among the settlers heading west was a group of Mormons and as they were passing, a few miles south of Fort Laramie, an Indian stole a cow. The Mormons reported this to Lieutenant Hugh B. Fleming, the commander of the post. Fleming demanded that the offender, High Forehead of the Minneconjou, face charges. Chief Conquering Bear suggested that the Mormons come to his herd of ponies and pick out the best pony he had to replace the cow, which to the Sioux these ponies were their wealth. This seemed to be a very gracious offer. Fleming would not agree and sent Lieutenant John L. Grattan to bring back the warrior. When Grattan arrived at Conquering Bears camp, he was given another offer. This time they could choose five ponies from five herds among the tribes. Grattan refused and began to open fire (Guttmacher 14-19). This outrageous act of war was not called for. The Mormons would have surely been satisfied with the ponies or the money the ponies would have bought. The government just did not want to keep the Indian-White relationship peaceful. Crazy Horse, then called Curly, was only thirteen when the soldiers and the Indians fought. The Indians outnumbered the soldiers and won the battle (Guttmacher 20).

Crazy Horse eventually became a leader of his people. In today's society our leaders are given money and gifts but in the times of Crazy Horse it was almost the opposite. He was expected to live modestly, keep only what he needed and give away the rest. After hunting he would give the needy the choicest meat and keep the stringy meat for himself. He did however, have the honor and prestige that allowed him to make the decisions for the tribe (Ambrose 125). As well as other Sioux leaders, Crazy Horse lead his people into the Powder River country. The reason for this move was to leave behind the ways of the white man and continue living the ways of the Sioux. The white man had brought to their country sickness, liquor and damaging lifestyles much different from the lifestyles of the Sioux

In 1865, U.S. officials wanted to obtain land from the Indians. They offered many different bribes, such as gifts and liquor, to the Indians who lived around the forts. They were very good at making the sell of land seem temporary and they convinced many that what the right thing to do was sell. The land they wanted was access land into the Powder River country. The government did not have the luck they needed in obtaining the land with money or bribes. So in the summer of 1865 they sent more than two thousand soldiers from Fort Laramie into the Powder River country (Ambrose 151).

In 1866 the government, knowing that the land they wanted was worth much more, offered the Sioux fifteen thousand dollars annually for access into Powder River country. The Indians did allow whites to use the Bozeman Trail just as they allowed immigrants to use the Holy Road. The U.S. Government had an obligation to protect its citizens but not to provoke a crisis. They did create a crisis when they established forts in the heart of Oglala territory. After conquering the confederates the U.S. Army was full of optimism and wanted desperately to have an all out war to exterminate the Sioux. Although the Indians were allowing the whites to use the Bozeman Trail, the government was not satisfied. They wanted the legal right to use the trail. E.B. Taylor, a government agent at one of the Indian Offices, tricked some of the Indian Leaders into going to Fort Laramie in 1866 for a treaty. He deliberately attempted to deceive them; he said nothing about building forts along the trail, only that they wanted to use the Bozeman Trail. He offered them guns, ammunition, gifts plus money. The Indians did not sell (Ambrose 213-214).

In June 1867, the government officials produced a new treaty. This treaty, like all the ones before, only promised lavish gifts to those who would sign. One of the Oglala chiefs, Red Cloud, wanted more for his nation than the simple gifts offered. He wanted the troops to move from the forts; Reno, Phil Kearny and C.F. Smith. During the summer of 1868 his request was accepted. The troops moved. A civil war hero William Tecumseh Sherman moved into the territory as the new commander of the plains. He had plans to get the treaty signed. His hopes were to, shut up the congressional critics, get the Sioux to agree on a treaty and maintain the army's morale. After negotiations were made Red Cloud lead one hundred-and twenty-five leaders of the Sioux nations to sign the treaty of 1868. This treaty guaranteed "absolute and undisturbed use of the Great Sioux Reservation. No person shall ever be permitted to pass over, settle upon, or reside in territory described in this article, or without consent of the Indians pass through the same" (Matthiessen 7-8). This treaty also stated that the hunting rights on the land between the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountains "as long as the grass shall grow and the water flows". (Guttmacher 73). It forced the Indians to be farmers and live in houses. There could be no changes made to the treaty without three fourths of all adult males of the Sioux nation agreeing (Ambrose 282).

The Indians had divided into those who agreed with the treaty,

the "friendly" and those who wanted nothing to do with the treaty, the "hostile". The U.S. government did not recognize these separate groups. They forbid trade with the Powder River Indians until all Indians moved to the reservation. This was not in the Treaty of 1868, (Guttmacher 76).

Even though the government was getting the best part of the treaty they were not satisfied with progress. In 1871 the Indian Appropriation Bill was passed which stated "hereafter no Indian nation or tribe within the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe or power with whom the U.S. may contract by treaty" (Matthiessen 7-8).

General Armstrong Custer was appointed as the new commander of the plains. He led the Seventh Cavalry on a mission to subdue a band of hostile Cheyenne. The cavalry came across an Indian village and attacked them instead. Black Kettle, the chief of the village and his wife were killed as they rode to surrender. This killing of 100 Cheyenne, mostly women and children, and 800 ponies was advertised as Custer's victory against the brutal savages (Guttmacher 81-82).

The U.S. Army led an expedition into the Sioux territory. According to the Treaty of 1868 this expedition was not legal. The expedition was to survey land for the Northern Pacific Railroad. The railroad meant progress. (Guttmacher 81).

Since the civil war the American economy was booming. Railroad stocks led the way. On, September 18 1873, banking crashed. Farm prices plummeted, grasshopper plaques ruined crops, yellow fever struck in the Mississippi Valley, and unemployment went sky high. The government figured that it's role was to pour money into the economy. The gold supply was insufficient. President Grant's solution to the economy was to open new territory for exploration. So in the spring of 1874 troops were sent to open a fort in the Black Hills. The government, exaggerated at the best or lied at the worst, said the Indians were not keeping up their part of the treaty. Custer was in charge of this expedition. During this expedition Custer claimed that there was gold in the Black Hills. Grant looked at this as an opportunity to show the country he could pull them from the depression and he opened the Black Hills for prospecting. This broke the treaty of 1868 again (Ambrose 343-346). The Black Hills was a sacred place to the Sioux. It was a place where spirits dwelled, a holy place called Pa Sapa by the Sioux. The whites had only the crudest concept of what the hills meant to the Indians. By 1876 ten thousand whites lived in Custer City, the frontier town of the southern Black Hills.

Agency Indians were not living very well on the reservations. Government agents were corrupt. They would accept diseased cattle, rotten flour and wormy corn. They would get a kickback on the profits. The Indians were undernourished and even starving. The agents also claimed the Indians exaggerated in their numbers just to receive more rations. However, in a census conducted by the government trying to prove this, they found that the Indians were actually claiming

less (Ambrose 359).

In 1876, the agencies were taken from the churches and given to the army to control. This was petitioned to Washington with statements that soldiers were obnoxious and their dislike for Indians was very obvious. Also the army was corrupting the Indians by introducing and encouraging alcohol and gambling. The petition also stated that all the agency troubles had been caused directly or indirectly by the soldiers. No change in policy was done on behalf of these petitions (Kadlecek 33).

Unwilling to pay for the Black Hills and unable to defeat the Sioux in war, on August, 15, 1876 Congress passed the Sioux Appropriation Bill. This bill stated that further provisions would not be given to the Sioux until the hostiles gave up the Black Hills, Powder River country and Bighorn country. They would also have to move to the Missouri River in Central Dakota or to Oklahoma. Upset because of their defeat the Government demanded unconditional surrender of the Sioux or they would starve those in the agencies. Red Cloud and the other chiefs were told to sign a treaty or their people would starve. Crazy horse and Sitting Bull continued to fight for land that was stolen from them in a misleading treaty (Ambrose 417-418). The Treaty of 1876 was not signed by at least three fourths of the male members of the Sioux nation as the Treaty of 1868 had stipulated. So they cheated by calling the treaty an "Agreement" instead of a treaty (Friswold 19).

The government had changed or disturbed nearly every part of the Indians lives. They had taken their horses (their wealth), taken their land, taken the buffalo and taken their tipis. They still had their religion. They had seven ceremonial rites of which two were the most beneficial; the Vision Quest and the Sun Dance. The Vision quest was an individual dance and the Sun Dance a community affair. In June 1877 the biggest Sun Dance seen on the reservation, twenty thousand strong, was held to honor Crazy Horse. This was the last big Sun Dance (Kadlecek 37-42).

Crazy Horse was finally persuaded to bring his people in to live on the reservation. Crazy horse was lied to when a government official told him that he was needed at a conference. He realized this was a trap when he saw bars on the windows. He drew his knife and attempted to break loose. A white soldier, William Gentiles, lunged at Crazy Horse with a fixed bayonet that punctured his kidney. Crazy Horse died September, 5 1877 (Kadlecek 53).

The Sioux Indians had lost nearly everything that made them a strong nation. In 1881 the government prohibited all reservations from allowing the Sun Dance. The government went against the First Amendment and took away the Sioux's greatest religious ceremony. General Sherman, never known as an Indian lover, said a reservation was "a parcel of land inhabited by Indians and surrounded by thieves" (Matthiessen 17). This type of harassment did not stop. In 1887 the General Allotment Act (the Dawes Act) was passed. This Act was

designed to assist the Indians to mainstream into America. Each male Indian was given 160 acres of land from the reservation. Of course the excess land was taken by the government and sold to the whites. The Indians were not accustomed to dealing with thieves and the majority of them lost their land through shady dealings (Matthiessen 17).

The U.S. Government used many deceptions to obtain the land the Indians once owned. The Sioux Indians were not treated with the most respect to say the least. They must be commended for staying strong and still being a big part of the United States today. Budd 3