

MASSACRE ON THE PLAINS: A BETTER WAY TO CONCEPTUALIZE  
GENOCIDE ON AMERICAN SOIL

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the massacres of the Plains Indian Wars in the United States (1851-1890) and how they relate to contemporary theories of genocide. By using the Plains Indian Wars as a case study, a critique can be made of theories which inform predictive models and genocide policy. This thesis analyzes newspaper articles, histories, congressional investigations, presidential speeches, and administrative policies surrounding the four primary massacres perpetrated by the United States during this time. An ideology of racial superiority and fears of insecurity, impurity, and insurgency drove the actions of the white settler-colonialists and their military counterparts. Still, despite the theoretical emphasis on massacre in genocide theory, massacres on the Plains were relatively rare compared to the use of other genocidal tactics. This demonstrates that contemporary genocide theorists must be careful not to unintentionally limit thinking on genocide to strict military or militia led violence.

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Dedicated to the many millions of lives who have been lost to fear fueled hatred and the many millions who suffer from this failure to love today, especially in my United States of America.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION, THEORY, AND CONTEXT

At noon on November 28, 1864, Colonel Chivington's 3rd Volunteer Cavalry of Colorado surrounded Fort Lyon and threatened to shoot any 1st Regiment soldiers that attempted to leave. Col. Chivington had cut off all mail coming in and out of southern Colorado during his march south, and the soldiers of Fort Lyon were given no warning that he was coming. The standoff lasted only moments before Major Anthony opened the gates and Col. Chivington marched inside the fort. Far from being a territorial battle in the midst of the American Civil War, the Fort Lyon guard, under Maj. Anthony, and Col. Chivington's Thirdsters were, in fact, very much on the same side.

Maj. Anthony was surprised by Chivington's appearance, but welcomed the Col. into the fort, where Chivington explained that he was seeking to attack the Indian camps that lay along the Arkansas River. He hoped to start with Black Kettle's camp of Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho, around 40 miles to the north. Maj. Anthony agreed, saying the only reason he had not gone north himself was lack of manpower. He ordered the 125 Fort Lyon 1st Regiment soldiers to prepare to march north. Chief Black Kettle had repeatedly assured U.S. military and civilian authorities of his commitment to friendship with the United States. His assurances seem to have had little effect on Anthony's enthusiasm for the mission. Chivington himself had heard Black Kettle's commitments to peace when he was present at a meeting between the Cheyenne chief and Governor Evans earlier that year. Despite this, in the words of the 1860s, both men belonged to the military's "extermination" faction when it came to how to deal with the "red menace."

In response to Chivington's proposed course of action, a group of officers led by Captain Soule and Lieutenant Cramer protested the plan, reminding Chivington and Anthony that Major Wynkoop, the previous head of Fort Lyon, had promised Black Kettle U.S. protection. They also reminded Maj. Anthony that he had disarmed the camp following negotiations over food rations. Moreover, John S. Smith, a U.S. interpreter, was accompanying some military personnel on a trading and intelligence gathering rendezvous with Black Kettle's camp. Chivington's reply was swift, "Damn any man in sympathy with the Indians."

A mutiny against the superior numbers of the 3rd Colorado Cavalry and two superior officers would have meant death. At 8pm, Cpt. Soule, Lt. Cramer, and the other protesting officers followed Col. Chivington north with Maj. Anthony and the rest of the combined force of the Colorado Thirdsters and Fort Lyon 1st Regiment. The men marched through the night, arriving at Black Kettle's camp at dawn. Col. Chivington ordered no prisoners to be taken (231, Josephy, Jr.) The soldiers drove off the Cheyenne's' horse herd, then assaulted the camp. In a desperate attempt to remind the soldiers that the camp was friendly and stop the attack, Black Kettle raised the American flag he had proudly received from an Indian agent, with a smaller white flag underneath.<sup>1</sup> Black Kettle's attempt to surrender would prove fruitless.

With cries of revenge for the Hungate family, the soldiers rushed forward, firing indiscriminately.<sup>2</sup> The Thirdsters, poorly trained and over-zealous, caught some 1st Regiment soldiers in a crossfire. This provided Cpt. Soule and Lt. Cramer an excuse to

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<sup>1</sup> Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), 88

<sup>2</sup> The Hungate family was killed in June earlier that year.

pull their soldiers back. At the sound of the gunfire, John Smith left his tent and moved towards the soldiers, hoping to explain that the camp was friendly and that there were U.S. personnel nearby. The troops fired several volleys at the approaching interpreter. John Smith fled back to his tent until he was later captured and brought to Chivington.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho fought the U.S. troops with the few old hunting rifles and bows they had at the camp. The elderly, children, and other non-combatants fled to the plains and up the dried creek bed. The warriors dug holes in the sides of the creek bed for protection and fired over the bank to defend those hiding inside. The U.S. soldiers fired into the holes, killing those within. A six-year-old girl came out of one hole with a white flag and was promptly shot down. The soldiers then approached the hole and killed all the women huddled inside.

Within a short time, most of those able to fight or flee had done so, and the killing took on an almost leisurely tone. A man saw a toddler stumbling about and nudged his comrade. He aimed, fired, and missed the child. The other soldier said, "Let me try the son of a bitch, I can hit him." He brought his rifle to his shoulder, fired, and missed. A third passing soldier approached, said something to the same effect, fired, and the child dropped. Further on, a woman lay on the bank, her leg broken by a shell. An approaching soldier broke the arm she raised to defend herself. She attempted to defend herself with her other arm, which the soldier also struck and broke. The soldier left her to die in the sand and snow.

After seven hours of violence, all who had been camped with Black Kettle had either managed to flee, or been shot down by Chivington's Thirdsters. Rather than chase after the Cheyenne and Arapaho who had fled, the soldiers went back over the battlefield,

looting the lodges and cutting and mutilating the fallen Cheyenne. Genitals were cut off and stuffed into mouths, scrotums saved to make tobacco pouches, and labia stretched over sticks and hats and paraded around. Infants were thrown in feedboxes, hearts carved out and put on sticks, and all were scalped.

Over the next two days, Chivington's men gathered the captured herd of horses, stole what they could carry, and burned whatever they elected to not take with them. Soldiers pulled John Smith's captured son, a "half-breed" named Jack, out of his tent and shot him in cold blood, despite appeals for his utility as a translator.<sup>3</sup> After the attack, Chivington chose not to move north towards the Dog Soldier military encampments of the Cheyenne nation, but south to search for Little Raven's encampment. After four days, he abandoned the search and returned to Denver where he was met with celebrations over his company's "brilliant feat of arms" against the Cheyenne nation.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to what is taught in many American schools, the genocide of the indigenous people of the United States was not always a quiet affair of disease and stoic disappearance into the twilight of history. Rather, the colonial settlers of the United States systematically eliminated nations in order to clear the way for American

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<sup>3</sup> His father, John Smith, would later go to Washington to give his deposition to various Congressional investigations.

<sup>4</sup> This introduction was compiled from a collection of sources: Hugh J. Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2010); Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," *Reports of the Committees*, 39 Cong., 2 sess. (Washington, DC: Washington Government Printing Office, 1867); United States War Department, "War of the Rebellion," *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Four series, 128 volumes. Series I - Volume XLI - Part I. Washington: Government Printing Office. 1880-1901.; Senate, "Sand Creek Massacre," Report of the Secretary of War, Sand Creek Massacre, Sen. Exec. Doc. No. 26, 39 Cong., 2 sess. (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1867); Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970).

settlement. This thesis explores how ideologies and military strategies at different levels of American society interacted during the settler colonial invasion of the “Great American Desert,” and the subsequent destruction of indigenous sovereignty over the Great Plains. In the end, an ideology of racial supremacy and fears of contamination, insecurity, and insurgency contributed to massacre on the Great Plains. These massacres, however, do not tell the whole story. Because of the influence of national power on the tactics of genocide we find that the theoretical conceptions of genocide may be applicable to the massacres that occurred, but they are not sufficient when dealing with genocides that use primary tactics that are dissimilar to the most often cited genocides of the past, such as the genocides in Germany, Rwanda, and the Ottoman Empire.

### Theories of Genocide and Mass Killing

“I was born upon the prairie, where the wind blew free and there was nothing to break the light of the sun. I was born where there was no enclosures and where everything drew a free breath.” Parra-Wa-Samen (Ten Bears) of the Yamparika Comanches.<sup>5</sup>

Since the Holocaust, researchers have put feverish effort into understanding how societies attempt to eliminate ethnic groups. Improved predictive models are increasingly allowing prevention practitioners to know when and where mass violence will occur, which gives them the ability to engage where aid is most needed. These models show the importance of recognizing concrete variables of mass violence, such as political instability, as well as less concrete variables such as ideology. Because ideology is both amorphous and integral to the process of genocide, this thesis focuses on the reasoning

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<sup>5</sup>Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 242

behind genocidal actions. In order to intervene in situations of genocide, patterns of thinking that contribute to genocide must be recognizable and theories of genocide must be sound. Theories that propose ideological underpinnings that encourage genocide must be critiqued with case study in order to verify their utility in recognizing genocidal intent.

Part of why genocidal theory seems incomplete is the strict intellectual association between genocide and mass killing.<sup>6</sup> Because the most famous genocides of our time were greatly defined by the episodes of mass murder that they contained, contemporary theories of genocide put a great deal of focus on mass killing as the result of genocidal ideology. This focus on mass killing, however, provides an incomplete understanding of genocide. Contemporary theories often focus too greatly on a single aspect of genocidal enterprises, namely, mass killing. Mass killing is not the only tool in an enterprising *génocidaire*'s toolbox. That said, the primary focus of this thesis will be the massacres that occurred. They should, according to theory, exemplify the reasons and reasoning of the genocidal enterprise. The argument could be presented as follows, "if mass killing occurred, and genocide occurred, they must be related." The data will help demonstrate to what extent mass killing is related to genocide, and whether mass killing paints the entire picture.

Second, contemporary theories of genocide often focus on either a bottom-up or top-down approach. Straus makes note that existing theoretical literature examines either state level top-down approaches to genocide or perpetrator-level explanations of

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<sup>6</sup> This thesis uses mass killing, mass murder, and massacre interchangeably. Definitions of massacre can make this relation complicated, but for the purposes of this study the killing of a group of non-combatant people, especially when unarmed or providing no organized resistance, will be treated as massacre, mass killing, or mass murder.

participation.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary genocide studies fails to engage in research that examines how mass violence is shaped by the interactions between local and national actors.<sup>8</sup> Genocide is an aggregate of acts of violence during a period of time. Therefore, what must be further explored is how state-level and local-level acts can differ in intent, scope, and motivation. Furthermore, the ways in which national and sub-national actors influence each other is of vital importance.<sup>9</sup> Our predictive models can therefore be improved by recognizing how genocidal ideology can differ at various levels and different geographic spaces in a society.

At present, there are two models that seek to predict genocide, one created by Harff in 2003 and one created by Goldsmith et al. in 2013. The major difference between the two is the unconditional two-stage approach used by Goldsmith et al. that allows the model to sample data globally, while Harff's model is built from episodes of genocide and politicide occurring after 1945.<sup>1011</sup>

These models, and the body of research that surrounds them, empirically demonstrate that almost all cases of genocide and politicide occur in the context of

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<sup>7</sup> Scott, Straus, "“Destroy Them to Save Us’: Theories of Genocide and the Logics of Political Violence,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24:4, 556

<sup>8</sup> Straus, “Destroy Them to Save Us,” 557.

<sup>9</sup> For an exemplary study on these aspects in instances of civil war, see Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Goldsmith, Charles Butcher, Dimitri Semenovich, and Arcot Sowmya, “Forecasting the onset of genocide and politicide: Annual out-of-sample forecasts on a global dataset, 1988-2003,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(4) 437-452

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Harff, “No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 57-73



political upheaval.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that the majority of periods of political upheaval have not been met with genocide or politicide, suggesting that genocide is mostly dependent on political upheaval, but political upheaval alone does not predict genocide.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Harff argues that while active discrimination against ethnic minorities is a significant causal factor leading to ethnic war, it does not explain which episodes of war are more likely to result in genocide or politicide.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that other variables are highly influential after the initial conditions of upheaval have been met.

Harff found extremist exclusionary ideologies to be a primary variable in identifying a state's likelihood to commit genocide or politicide.<sup>15</sup> This exclusionary ideology is defined as "some overriding purpose or principle that justifies efforts to restrict, persecute, or eliminate certain categories of people."<sup>16</sup> Goldsmith et al. found a

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<sup>12</sup> "an abrupt change in the political community caused by the formation of a state or regime through violent conflict, redrawing of state boundaries, defeat in international war... revolutions, anticolonial rebellions, separatist wars, coups, and regime transitions that result in the ascendancy of political elites who embrace extremist ideologies." Ibid. 62

<sup>13</sup> See Harff, "No Lessons Learned," 57-73; Benjamin Valentino and Jay Ulfelder. "Assessing Risks of State-Sponsored Mass Killing," Political Instability Task Force. (February, 2008); Goldsmith et al., "Forecasting the onset of genocide and politicide," 437-452.

<sup>14</sup> Harff, "No Lessons Learned," 70.

<sup>15</sup> Harff's other primary variables include political instability, habituation as a strategic response, authoritarian regimes, ethnic minority political elite, and international economic interdependence. As mentioned, the first one is widely seen as a precondition of mass violence, both in quantitative and theoretical research. The latter two would have had minimal effect on the United States in the 1850s, as the United States was ruled by an ethnic majority and not beholden to the United Nations rules on human rights and genocide because they had yet to be invented or enforced. Democracy in the United States is more complicated, because the U.S. was a full democracy, but centralized power was weak on the peripheries and during the Civil War. This will be examined in greater detail during the analysis. Also see Harff, Goldsmith et al., Valentino et al., Valentino and Ulfelder, Sémelin, Jones, Straus.

<sup>16</sup> Harff, "No Lessons Learned," 63

similar statistically significant variable in state-led discrimination.<sup>17</sup> Harff focuses on state violence, thus her model does not examine how exclusionary ideology may affect actions by local-level actors, regardless of whether the state itself pursues a policy of violence based on exclusionary ideology. She does not examine how exclusionary ideology of local-level actors on the periphery may outweigh a regime that is not a strong proponent of such ideology, ignoring bottom-up approaches. Because this thesis seeks to examine how ideology and actions may differ between local and national actors, the ideology of both levels, and the subsequent actions of both levels, becomes vitally important. Furthermore, increased knowledge of the motivations, justifications, and insight behind efforts to restrict, persecute, and eliminate provides multiple areas of intervention in contemporary cases of genocide.

A second important area to cover in order to analyze genocidal actions and intent are conceptual models of genocide theory. These theories help examine the ways that national and subnational actors begin to formulate a plan of mass violence, and give suggestions as to how they might influence each other. Two primary theories of genocide, both focusing on massacre as a primary tool of genocide, will be examined here. One alternative explanation of massacre will be provided to critique these primary theories.

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<sup>17</sup> Goldsmith et al. received the data that would be needed to include exclusionary ideology in the final stages of the model creation, and due to its conditional usage chose not to use the data, nor the variable, in their model. They use several other variables that might suggest this ideology, and make the note that it is an important intuitive predictor of mass violence. Goldsmith et al., "Forecasting the onset of genocide and politicide," 442.

## “Purify and Destroy”

Jacques Sémelin is a representative author on genocide theory, who sees genocide as being primarily born out of collective anxiety. His thesis is rooted in individual childhood fears of destruction which perceives aggression in strangers, even if they are not openly hostile.<sup>18</sup> He later cites theories of aggression which argue that societies operate similarly, with the unknown causes of instability producing anxiety. Individual fears of societal destruction and suffering lead them to associate that anxiety with out-groups.<sup>19</sup> Given a *known* cause of destruction and suffering, the society will place, or are encouraged to place, hostility and aggressive intent on the other group, justifying their anxiety. Their anxiety becomes an existential fear of this hostile enemy.<sup>20</sup> This fear evolves into a hatred, which Sémelin argues “inevitably boils down to eliciting in society the desire to destroy what has been designated as the source of fear.”<sup>21</sup>

Still, there are many examples of societies which do not translate anxiety to fear of the ‘other.’<sup>22</sup> Though Sémelin does not state this explicitly, it is implied the idea that genocide is the end of a spectrum of violence. The goal is to explain “how violence can

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<sup>18</sup> Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide*, trans. Cynthia Schoch. (New York : Colombia University Press, 2007), 20

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Sémelin also argues that there are always actors who will naturally “denounce... outrageous demagogy.” The fear of ‘other’ ideology is never guaranteed “ascendancy over public opinion” (16). Indeed, even when an ideological power holds sway politically there will be resisters, such as mixed couples refusing to divorce, even in Nazi controlled Germany, in that case providing a “resistance of the heart [that was]... a recurring problem for the Nazis.” Ibid., 30.

multiply its destructive intensity.”<sup>23</sup> Sémelin theorizes that genocidal ideology is born of three ideological underpinnings: identity, purity, and security.

Sémelin begins his analysis through an exploration of identity creation. A practice common to all humans, the creation of identity relies on distinguishing the self from others, or the collective from other collectives. Sémelin sees this collective identity creation as “basically a narcissistic inclination” in which the individual hopes to “distinguish oneself and reinforce one’s own self-esteem.”<sup>24</sup> More important to Sémelin is the “rebirth or recomposition of ‘us’ as a collective response to a situation of crisis, trauma or intense upheaval.”<sup>25</sup> Sémelin posits that a common response for individuals reacting to fear is to root themselves in a collective identity in order to comfortably react as a “community.”<sup>26</sup>

While identity is not necessarily an issue for Sémelin, the nationalist fervor that he portrays becomes dangerous in the ways it manifests pride and collective identity. In particular, he examines the “stigmatization of minor differences.”<sup>27</sup> The collective seeks to maintain “oneness,” especially in reaction to crisis, and in this “search for ‘oneness’” will begin targeting political dissidents of the in-group before targeting those that are

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 24-27

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 27.

more identifiably ‘other.’<sup>28</sup> Simply put, the common genocidal refrain seems to be, “you’re either with us or against us.”

The culmination of these efforts to create and fulfill a common identity is an eventual “quest for purity.” This naturally begins with purity of identity, where there is a right and wrong way to be however the collective identity is defined. As Sémelin notes, however, “to define oneself as ‘pure’ in fact implies categorizing some ‘other’ as impure.”<sup>29</sup> While a dichotomy between pure and impure seems unrealistic, Sémelin notes that during times of crisis, a human under threat immediately seeks out those who “wish [them] good” as opposed to “evil.”<sup>30</sup>

Further, Sémelin notes the common association of the nation with an organic body, and references biology, epidemiology, or metaphors of blood.<sup>31</sup> This metaphor allows the ‘other’ to be defined as disease or vermin, and serves as an aid to the process of dehumanization that accompanies various forms of violence. Metaphors of impurity and dehumanization are seen by various researchers as particularly informative in examinations of genocide.<sup>32</sup> Sémelin rhetorically asks, “Is this Other in excess even

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<sup>28</sup> Note Sémelin’s examples of concentration camps originally being used to house socialist and communist prisoners, Milosevic targeting Yugoslavian communists, and Hutu extremists targeting Hutu moderates as well as Tutsis, even before the genocide. Ibid., 31, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 33, 34, 37, respectively. See also Mann, Michael. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.)

<sup>32</sup> See Gregory Stanton, “The Ten Stages of Genocide” retrieved from <http://www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-of-genocide>; Nick Haslam and Steve Loughnan, “Dehumanization and Infrahumanization,” *Annual Review of Psychology* (2014) 65:399-423; Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2011.)

human, in fact?” and continues, stating that “the ‘bestialization’ of the enemy is a highly significant indicator of the potential unleashing of violence against him.”<sup>33</sup> The repetitive metaphor of vermin, insect, or disease provides justification for both elimination and separation, in part thanks to the automatic revulsion that accompanies an association with the unhealthy vectors of sickness that the ‘other’ is associated with.<sup>34</sup> Sémelin argues that this association becomes a fear of the ‘impure other’ that is ‘contaminating’ the ‘organic body’ of the nation, state, or ‘people’. The result is a desire to destroy the contaminant in order to protect and preserve the nation. This desire to protect and preserve is also central to Sémelin’s final underpinning of genocide, which is a threat to the security of the ‘in-group’.

This threat to the security of the ‘in-group’ can be real, imagined, or both. As Jones aptly states, “nearly every *génocidaire* considers himself or herself oppressed by the target group.”<sup>35</sup> The common rhetorical emphasis is well summarized by Sémelin as well, “We are the victims of History. If we are all victims, we certainly have the right to defend ourselves against Them! Besides, didn’t they slaughter us in the past?” The next conclusion is, “won’t they slaughter/oppress us in the future?” This idea was widely publicized by anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany before the Holocaust.<sup>36</sup> Both in the case of

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<sup>33</sup> Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Jones. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. (New York: Routledge, 2011.) 390-394

<sup>35</sup> Jones, *Genocide*, 396.

<sup>36</sup> I am referring here to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fabricated document published in 1903 connecting Jews to a secret conspiracy to control the planet using economic power and espionage. This was also used as an “explanation” for Germany’s defeat in World War I, reinforcing an identity building belief in German superiority and invincibility. Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 44.

Nazi Germany and 1994 Rwanda, the belief of imminent threat was used by extremists to ‘justify’ a ‘preemptive attack’. This ‘imminent threat’ logic can occur regardless of how legitimate or realistic the threat may be. The Jewish population in 1930s Germany, for example, was so small that it could have constituted no real threat to the power of the German government.<sup>37</sup> 1994 Rwanda was in the midst of a civil war, constituting a legitimate threat of armed violence that extremists could reference when rallying allies to their cause. Sémelin returns to collective anxiety, stating that the narrative of an enemy threatening the nation, country, or collective “reinforces this feeling of anxiety.”<sup>38</sup> These threats against identity, purity, and security contribute to the construction of identity narratives that justify violence against the ‘other’. These collective anxieties justify a collective’s desire to “destroy them to save us.”<sup>39</sup>

One area of Sémelin’s theory that has yet to be thoroughly explored is to whom it applies. Sémelin certainly applies this theory to the elite leaders of governments and militaries who use these excuses in order to mobilize groups to attack other groups, however the exact motivations, on a perpetrator level, can be more complicated. Michael Mann, as an example, briefly explores nine different common perpetrator level motivation.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, these collective feelings of anxiety, security, purity, and identity must be examined in relation to how they affect and motivate controlling

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<sup>37</sup> Note here, however, the connection between Jews and an outside threat in the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy. As this collective anxiety searches for a source it continues to project until it can be seen as legitimate, if not rational.

<sup>38</sup> Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy*, 27-29.

subnational actors, especially as subnational actors affect democracies or partial democracies.

### “Blood and Soil”

Ben Kiernan provides a different viewpoint of how genocide occurs. His theory offers a greater focus on the settler colonial genocides perpetrated by the United States and Australia. In his greatly inclusive book studying genocide from early antiquity to the present, Kiernan explores the underpinnings of genocide because “informed deterrence or timely prevention are more feasible if common features of perpetrators’ genocidal thinking can be identified in advance of their rise to power.” As such, he goes forth examining the interweaving “obsessions” that supply “lethal ideological ammunition to projects of violent militarism and territorial expansion.”<sup>41</sup>

Kiernan theorizes three primary ideological features that are common in genocide: racism, cults of antiquity, and cults of agrarian land expansion.<sup>42</sup> These features inform and guide the rest of his inquiry into genocide from antiquity to modernity, and they are all marked as involving “idealized conceptions of the world, utopian or dystopian, divorced from reality but capable of being forcefully imposed upon it.”<sup>43</sup> Racism in Kiernan’s sense is the perceived inferiority or threat of a group based on its imagined

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<sup>41</sup> Ben Kiernan. *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007): 21.

<sup>42</sup> Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 21-40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



fixed characteristics. This is not limited to the five “great” racial groups, and can include national groups, ethnic groups, tribes, bands, etc.<sup>44</sup> The perpetrators may see a victim group as inferior or backwards, or see themselves as superior; likely the racist belief will be built on both.<sup>45</sup> This is usually accompanied by a “phobia of contamination” which leads to forced distance.<sup>46</sup> This includes, but is not limited to, preventing “contamination” of women by the men of the target group, and enforcing segregation of contact, if possible.<sup>47</sup> Kiernan theorizes that this belief leads perpetrators to imagine “a world without certain kinds of people in it.”<sup>48</sup> Kiernan argues that this fantasy is further compounded by obsessions with “antiquity” and “agrarianism.”

Kiernan’s “cult of antiquity” is defined as a “preoccupation with restoring purity and order.”<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, Kiernan emphasizes the “return to an imagined pure origin,” however his examples of origins are often unrelated directly to the cultures that claim them. His examples include Hitler considering classical Sparta as a model racist state, English and Dutch imperialists invoking ancient Roman precedent, Muscovy grand princes claiming descent from Augustus Caesar, and colonialists seeing native subjects as “ancient Scythian barbarians rematerializ[ed].”<sup>50</sup> This imagined pure history is repeated

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 28.

as a justification for “eradication of foreign contamination,” regardless of whether the “foreign contamination” is based in real history or not. Though Kiernan emphasizes the past, the antiquity that this ideology is based around is, rather, an identity fantasy built out of a racialized narrative of superiority. Regardless of the origin, this obsession is marked by a desire to “arrest a perceived decline, restore a lost utopia, or inscribe a purportedly ancient model on someone else’s land.”<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, the emphasis is not on the purity aspect of foreign contamination, but on the idealization of antiquity. The foreign contamination, in this case, is a metaphor for invasion, but is not conceptualized by its relation to disease or vermin.

Finally, an interesting, and relatively unique, aspect of Kiernan’s theory is his “cult of cultivation” which argues that agrarian societies develop a sense of superiority that stems from land use, and results in an intense desire to dispossess hunter-gatherers or pastoralists in order to gain agricultural land.<sup>52</sup> This, argues Kiernan, is a modern development that began valorizing farm labor as being morally superior and creating healthier lifestyles. This romantic view of the agriculturalists was transplanted to the colonies as it was being developed. This ideology created a sense that agriculture was indicative of man taming the chaotic natural world. This romance of agrarianism, coupled with economic competition and a desire for territorial expansion, served as justification for the removal of indigenous people from their lands.<sup>53</sup> While an emphasis on this

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 33.

obsession seems rare, it is referenced in other theories. Sémelin, for example, references agrarianism as a means to the end of “purity” saying:

“This metaphor [of purity] can be extended to the need to defend the purity of civilization against the corruption of modernity. The outcome is often an apologia of nature and particularly peasants, the true champions of tradition and the eternal soul of the people.”<sup>54</sup>

In the nineteenth-century the cult began to be combined with national identity, with peasant farmers representing the purist form of the nation. This obsession is joined with the aforementioned racist ideology to justify agrarianism not as an ideal by itself, but as an ideal for the agriculturalists of “the nation.”<sup>55</sup> Kiernan points out that this cult was transplanted to colonial nations, such as Australia and the Thirteen Colonies, however the sense of national or ethnic superiority proved more powerful than the celebration of agriculture, as settlers violently pushed indigenous land managers off their land.<sup>56</sup>

Kiernan’s theory considers this obsession with agriculture as a defining reason for settler greed and territorial expansion. Importantly, this is without mentioning greed being a hallmark of mass violence, as theorized in Jones’ summary of psychological theories of genocide. Jones notes, “greed is more than a desire for material goods beyond those necessary for survival. It is intimately connected to the existential hunger for

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<sup>54</sup> Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> In some cases, it should be noted, indigenous land managers were the targets of ethnic cleansing despite advanced political and agricultural institutions, such as the Five Civilized tribes being pushed from North Carolina and Georgia. At the time of the “Trail of Tears,” the Cherokee had a Supreme Court, a constitution, and a capital city (New Echota). As will be later noted, despite overt appeals to the cult of cultivation, even indigenous agriculturalists were not immune to the power of collective narcissism and settler greed. *Ibid.*, 33.

power, domination, and prestige.”<sup>57</sup> Kiernan does not explicitly mention greed, but it is interesting to note that as this romantic view of agrarianism continued to grow, so too did the number of people living in cities, rather than the rural pastures that were so romanticized.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Kiernan argues that the push for agricultural land and the romanticism of nature came primarily from urban writers.<sup>59</sup>

Kiernan sums up his theory of perpetration by exploring the “prudent compromise” present in committing genocide.<sup>60</sup> He states that genocide is “usually undertaken by radical, unstable regimes” that “silence domestic differences by focusing attention on an external, supposedly common threat.”<sup>61</sup> Kiernan perceives state-sponsored mass killing as a chaotic time, with rapidly changing alliances, differing information depending on audiences, and the mobilization of enormous human, material, and administrative resources.<sup>62</sup> This reflects the elite exclusionary ideology and political instability present in Harff and Goldsmith et al.’s models. Despite what seems to be a top-down theorization, he clarifies that genocide need not be state-sponsored, or even consistently focused on killing. He provides Lemkin’s definition of cultural genocide and

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<sup>57</sup> Jones, *Genocide*, 388.

<sup>58</sup> Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 29-33.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Kuper's views of the widespread phenomenon of "genocidal massacres" as alternatives to the widely intuited state-sponsored mass killings that occupies much research focus.<sup>63</sup>

### Massacre as a Tactic of War

Finally, an important approach to explaining genocide on the Great Plains is summarized by the critical perspective that mass killings without regard to combat status is a strategic response to threats to political power. There is a reliable theoretical emphasis on genocide occurring during times of insecurity, and particularly during periods of war.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, some of the most commonly cited examples of genocide all fit within this criteria, including the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Bosnia.

Sémelin, despite his strong emphasis on genocide being born from ideology, does imply instability as a powerful driver for the creation of exclusionary ideology, saying "If our own country sink into an increasingly serious economic crisis, with dismal parades of millions of unemployed, if it was harassed by terrorist attacks, each one bloodier than the last, how long would we remain impervious to this way of thinking? No society, when it falls apart, is exempt from such processes [of mass violence]."<sup>65</sup> For Sémelin, war

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>64</sup> See Sémelin, Harff, Goldsmith et al., Valentino et al., Valentino and Ulfelder.

<sup>65</sup> Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 9.

increases instability, which increases the collective anxiety of a nation and the search for enemies, which in turn leads to more common use of violence.

Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay point to wars which combat insurgency as a specific kind of war that offers strategic incentives for targeting civilian populations.<sup>66</sup> Because insurgencies tend to avoid battles that directly pit their forces against the often larger and better equipped state forces, armies leading counterinsurgency campaigns often “choose to target the guerrillas’ base of support in the population.”<sup>67</sup> Also important is the finding that insurgent groups that “lack popular support or do not pose a serious military threat to the regime” are more likely to be kept “in check without targeting civilians in large numbers.”<sup>68</sup>

This theory was further tested by Valentino and Ulfelder’s 2008 analysis. They theorized from these studies that mass killing is the result of a “rationalist view... in which deliberate violence against noncombatant civilians is understood as a tactic used by weak or insecure governments against political challengers.”<sup>69</sup> This makes the targeting of noncombatants an “instrumental tactic” that regimes use to respond to threats.<sup>70</sup> State weakness in this context is not limited to states that do not have strong “financial resources [or] policy choices” but can also reflect the “penetration of the

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<sup>66</sup> Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay. “‘Draining the Sea’: Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare,” *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Spring, 2004), 376

<sup>67</sup> Valentino et al., “Draining the Sea,” 377.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Valentino, Benjamin, and Ulfelder, Jay. “Assessing Risks of State-Sponsored Mass Killing,” *Political Instability Task Force*. (February, 2008): 18.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

central state into the periphery.”<sup>71</sup> Importantly, this theoretical framework reflects an explanation of genocide which allows for mass violence without relying on an ideological framework that demands extermination, though it is not mutually exclusive with such a framework.

Like many theories, these theories ultimately explore genocide through an emphasis on massacre. This forces prevention practitioners to give an inordinate amount of theory weight, and therefore predictive weight, to genocides that emphasized massacre. The mass killing events that will be explored will be examined according to how they relate to identity, purity, security, agrarianism, cults of antiquity, and counterinsurgency and to what extent these facets of motivation can be seen. Through better understanding of the underlying motivations that affect subnational and national actors, theory can be critiqued and refined to present better points of intervention.

### Plains Nations and the United States in Context

The story of genocide in the United States spans two hundred and fifty years of history. Due to the length of time, and the many other genocides that seem to take academic precedence, many genocide theorists do not explore this period with deep cultural and situational analysis. As such, it is common to see theorists generalizing information, which leads to missing the nuances, perspectives, and depth of reasons for the violence that occurred over that long and somber history.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 15.

For activism around the genocide of the Native Americans this is as effective an approach as is needed. Regardless of which genocidal practices are given more or less weight, virtually all methods of ethnic extermination were used. For a practitioner of genocide prevention, however, this generalization of the many tribes, ethnicities, and peoples of the Americas should raise some red flags. While there were many ideologically driven genocidal massacres in the history of the United States, it is dangerous to refer to these massacres as if they all happened to one people, because, at the level of analysis, we must recognize that the indigenous nations of the Americas responded to the threat of the white man in many different ways. Likewise, the genocidal practices used by the United States changed over time and depending on nation. Furthermore, the inclination and tactical decision making of the government, the *demos*, and the military changed over time as well, often in ways that ended up conflicting with each other. Therefore, in order to best use information from this time period to develop genocide prevention practices, there must be a careful and thorough examination of the context in which specific acts of genocide took place.

That being said, the goal of this brief history is not to give the reader a complete sense of everything that occurred within the main conflict periods of the Plains Indian Wars.<sup>72</sup> There are excellent books and resources that cover that, and not enough time to give every event its due attention. Rather, the goal of this brief cultural history is to give researchers without thorough knowledge of Plains Indian cultures some contextual information for better understanding of the specific events that follow. Certain

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<sup>72</sup> The period of conflict between settlers and nations on the plains is usually demarcated as being from the first Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851 to the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.



information, such as differences between the United States and the various Plains Indian nations' governance structures, cultural values, and worldviews, will help demonstrate some of the underlying tensions and miscommunications that led to U.S. adoption of *specific* genocidal practices.

For the purposes of this study, the Plains Indian nations and the United States culturally differed in three key areas: warfare, government, and land ownership.<sup>73</sup> Historically, Plains Indian warfare was characterized by its role as a “proving ground” for young men, and not always a tool to achieve “national objectives” or as an “instrument of policy.”<sup>74</sup> Conversely, the settlers who began moving into the plains saw war as a means to achieve the goal of supremacy and national security. Furthermore, for the Plains Indians the death of your enemies was not necessary for victory in battle or even for victory in the war itself. Settler warfare, on the other hand, achieved victory in battle by “inflicting as many casualties as possible and thereby reduce their enemy’s numbers.”<sup>75</sup> Several chapters in Marshall’s biography of Crazy Horse deal with Crazy Horse’s attempt to understand the changing nature of war on the Great Plains, and how Lakota

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<sup>73</sup> There are many names for the nations that exist on the Great Plains. There are names they have been called by various European groups, names they have called themselves, and names they have given each other. In this thesis, I have chosen to refer to the Lakota as the Sioux to avoid confusion with older sources, though the “Sioux” are represented by a variety of contemporary nations. For a systematic explanation of the various names, see Joseph M. Marshall III. *The Journey of Crazy Horse: a Lakota History*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> Joseph M. Marshall III, *The Journey of Crazy Horse: a Lakota History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004): 191

<sup>75</sup> Marshall, *Journey of Crazy Horse*, 191.

conceptions of warfare would have to change if they wanted to achieve victory via military means.<sup>76</sup>

National goals on the Great Plains also differed. The U.S. government was seeking to achieve supremacy, security, and control of land, particularly when the land proved profitable due to gold or silver. On the other hand, for many groups of indigenous people the constant encroachment of settlers was a threat to their way of life. Even before the reservation system was established on the Great Plains and the United States sought to “civilize” the Plains Indians through cultural destruction, the Oregon Trail and the railroad divided traditional Plains Indians land in half. These two dividers created a distinct barrier between nations, such as the northern and southern Cheyenne, and caused great ecological harm due to over-intensive land use along the Oregon Trail and the disruption of migration patterns for buffalo herds. Because the economy of the Plains Indians relied almost entirely on the buffalo, disruption and destruction of the buffalo was a serious existential threat.

The Plains Indians also had a very different conception of government than that of the United States. The United States emphasized a hierarchical system in which someone was chosen as a representative leader and could make decisions on behalf of the people. While there were certainly well respected leaders among the various tribes of the Plains Indians, that did not necessarily grant those leaders the power to make decisions for all members of a nation. A leader could lose power and respect over decisions, thus reducing that leader’s effectiveness in controlling the many members of the tribe. A good example

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<sup>76</sup> While Crazy Horse was not ultimately successful in maintaining independence, his military successes would provide him the foundation for centuries of myth and idolization.)

is the power held by military societies, such as the Hotamitanos (Dog Soldiers) of the Southern Cheyenne. More inclined to follow younger warriors such as Roman Nose and Tall Bull, the younger men and Dog Soldiers could not always be corralled by Black Kettle, the agreed upon chief of the Southern Cheyenne.<sup>77</sup> This led to significant conflict and misunderstanding between indigenous governments and the United States. The United States expected the “chief” of the Cheyenne to be able to decide on a course of action and be followed by younger members. This was not, effectively, the case, and when exploring events that occurred on the Great Plains, contemporary readers must be able to separate the “warring” and “peaceful” factions among the Cheyenne, as well as recognize how the U.S. government may have been unable to (or chose not to) do so.

Plains Indian’ understanding of land ownership was looser and more collective than European understanding of land ownership. Land was seen as shared, sometimes in a community sense, and other times in a national sense. The Black Hills, for example, were “given” to the Lakota in the first Fort Laramie treaty, but the hills had traditionally been shared by the Cheyenne and the Lakota. In this sense, the treaty was built to fail, in part because invisible lines in the land meant little to the Cheyenne and Lakota people. The Plains Indians relied more on fluid conceptions of influence over space than treaty decided lines that would denote borders of influence. Another example comes out of a visit to the new city of Denver by Arapaho chief Little Raven who said he “was glad to see [the settlers] getting gold, but reminded them that the land belonged to the Indians,

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<sup>77</sup> Hugh Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2010): 10.

and expressed the hope they would not stay around after they found all the yellow metal they needed.”<sup>78</sup>

Lastly, during the 1800s the U.S. Supreme Court introduced a great deal of contradictory legal principles in regards to native nations, which are best summarized in Finkelman and Garrison’s *Encyclopedia of United States Indian Policy and Law*:

“tribes are “tenants” not owners of their soil, but tribes are the true owners of their lands; tribes are domestic-dependent nations, but tribes are distinct and independent nations; tribes resemble “wards,” but tribes have a national status equal to that of foreign governments.”<sup>79</sup>

This sounds confusing and contradictory, because it is. The legal statements above show the various shifts in view the Supreme Court had depending on the Court and the case, and created Indian law and policy that was often difficult to predict, due to varying precedent. What it shows, effectively, was the difficulty in using law and legal precedent as a basis for determining a federal, legal view of native people. Native people were sometimes viewed as legal wards of the state, and other times as sovereign; sometimes as fully human actors, and other times as uncivilized and unworthy of personhood or rights.

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<sup>78</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 69.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Finkelman and Tim Alan Garrison, *Encyclopedia of United States Indian Policy and Law: Volume II* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2009): 819.

## CHAPTER II

### MASSACRE ON THE PLAINS

#### Sand Creek - 1864

“Nothing lives long  
Only the earth and the mountains.”  
- White Antelope’s death song<sup>80</sup>

The Sand Creek massacre is notable for its graphic violence and well documented mutilations. The arguments for why it occurred are often embedded in theoretical explanations that attempt to explain why genocidal violence against indigenous people of the United States generally occurred. Mann cites Sand Creek as an example of the part-time volunteer forces receiving state wages that provided “more routine genocidal thrust” for the building of democracies.<sup>81</sup> Kiernan rightly places Sand Creek as representative of the “exterminationist atmosphere among whites,” and uses it to support his overall thesis of genocides of extermination.<sup>82</sup> Kiernan’s view will prove to be an incomplete, although not incorrect, assessment.

There are competing narratives exploring why Sand Creek itself happened. The most plausible centers around the ever increasing fear and anger of the Coloradoan settlers and their push for the military to adopt extermination oriented policies. Of course, newspapers as far away as New York printed headlines and articles that explored

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 89.

<sup>81</sup> Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy*, 98.

<sup>82</sup> Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 357.

depredations in the territories. These stories ranged from outlaws in Arizona to Sioux warriors in Minnesota or, conversely, from Apache depredations in Arizona to outlaws in Minnesota.<sup>83</sup> In 1862, failure to provide the promised food rations led increasingly desperate Sioux people to revolt and attack the surrounding towns. The Great Sioux Uprising dominated territory newspapers, particularly in Iowa and Minnesota. Leading to the largest mass execution in U.S. history, the real threat of Sioux attack contributed to an increase in militant viewpoints against all indigenous people in Minnesota, even the friendly Winnebagos.<sup>84</sup> The Sioux were dehumanized, called “wild beasts,” and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Dole stated that his purpose was to “utterly... exterminate the Sioux if I have the power to do so.”<sup>85</sup> These built off a reputation that would remain consistent regarding Indian depredations, that the government was unable or unwilling to engage in the task of defending settlers against Indian violence.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, editorials appealed to the government, stating that the “Sioux nation... must be exterminated or driven so far as to leave no room for apprehension that they will return.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> “A Rising Storm in Mexico,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1860, <http://www.nytimes.com/1860/03/05/news/a-rising-storm-in-mexico.html>; The New York Times Digital Archives, *New York Times*, March 1, 1860 to December 31, 1865.

<sup>84</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 10.

<sup>85</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 10-11.

<sup>86</sup> “Our Frontier Policy.” *New York Times*. March 8, 1860. <http://www.nytimes.com/1860/03/08/news/our-frontier-policy.html>; “THE INDIAN WAR.; Terrible Battle with the Indians Two Towns Burned. Appeal from Northwestern Iowa. Incidents of the Minnesota Indian War.” *New York Times*. September 14, 1862. <http://www.nytimes.com/1862/09/14/news/indian-war-terrible-battle-with-indians-two-towns-burned-appeal-northwestern.html?pagewanted=2>; Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> “THE INDIAN WAR.; Terrible Battle with the Indians Two Towns Burned. Appeal from Northwestern Iowa. Incidents of the Minnesota Indian War.” *New York Times*. September 14, 1862. <http://www.nytimes.com/1862/09/14/news/indian-war-terrible-battle-with-indians-two-towns-burned-appeal-northwestern.html?pagewanted=2>

Knowledge of these events, along with depredations that reflected raid warfare, and involved the theft of livestock, embedded in the Coloradoans “high levels of anxiety.”<sup>88</sup>

This sense of general anxiety began to turn into legitimate fear on the part of the Coloradoans in the spring and summer of 1864, when militaristic factions in the Cheyenne nation, led by Roman Nose, gained greater influence.<sup>89</sup> These factions advocated a military response to U.S. attacks on Cheyenne camps.<sup>90</sup> Included among these attacks were the murder of the Hungate family south east of Denver. The bodies were brought to Denver and displayed. This transformed what may have been a remote fear into a very present and local fear. Now the failure of the U.S. government to secure the territories was not resulting in violence in Minnesota, California, or New Mexico, but at home, not 40 miles from Denver citizens’ doorsteps. And with the famous mobility of the Cheyenne nation, that violence could quickly occur anywhere in Colorado.

In response, Governor Evans of the territory of Colorado issued a proclamation in June instructing traders and agents to inform all “friendly Indians” to relocate to specific

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<sup>88</sup> Although, not always was this livestock “stolen.” Settlers might report lost livestock as stolen by Indians to get military response or compensation, as was the case in the lead up to the Grattan massacre. Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 75; Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 18; Marshall, *The Journey of Crazy Horse*, 39-40; “PROCEEDINGS OF CONGRESS.; SENATE.” *New York Times*. May 25, 1864. <http://www.nytimes.com/1864/05/26/news/proceedings-of-congress-senate.html>

<sup>89</sup> It is important to recognize when speaking about real and imagined fear of the Coloradoans, that real and imagined fear was taking place in the Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho nations. While this thesis focuses on what led to violence perpetrated by white Americans, and so focuses on their fears and anxieties, there exist excellent sources that explore the fear and insecurity of indigenous communities from indigenous perspectives such as the previously cited *The Journey of Crazy Horse* by John Marshall III.

<sup>90</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 73-77.

forts.<sup>91</sup> Friendly Arapahoes and Cheyenne were instructed in this proclamation to relocate to Fort Lyon. Two months later, in a second proclamation, he authorized “all citizens of Colorado, either individually or in such parties as they may organize, to go in pursuit of all hostile Indians on the plains, scrupulously avoiding those who have responded to my said call to rendezvous at the points indicated.”<sup>92</sup>

All of this took place in the context of the Civil War, and fears of alliances between the Confederate States and indigenous nations wishing to gain an upper hand against the United States was common and the source of great anxiety for settlers in the territories. The *Rocky Mountain News* connected the Confederacy and the Plains tribes in an article which stated, “They tell them that the whites in Colorado want their hunting grounds from them and will take their squaws and everything they have and if the Indian will join them they will go with them and take Denver and give the whole country to the Indian.”<sup>93</sup> This connection between dangers both present and afar is similar in nature to the aforementioned Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy, although the latter was thoroughly a myth. In the United States there were native nations that allied with the Confederacy. The Cheyenne and Arapaho, however, were not among them.

It was in this context of fear and insecurity that the Sand Creek Massacre occurred. The 3rd Colorado Volunteer Cavalry was made up of men from Denver. The Cavalry was led by Chivington, who was “ruthlessly ambitious, as well as contemptuous

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<sup>91</sup> United States War Department. “War of the Rebellion” *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Four series, 128 volumes. Series I - Volume XLI - Part I. Washington: Government Printing Office. 1880-1901. pp. 963-964

<sup>92</sup> Senate, “The Chivington Massacre,” *Reports of the Committees*, 39 Cong., 2 sess. (Washington, DC: Washington Government Printing Office, 1867): 47.

<sup>93</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 19.



of ethical or legal restraints,” and described by one of his superiors as “a crazy preacher who thinks he is Napoleon Bonaparte.”<sup>94</sup> Chivington had close contact with Governor Evans, and had been part of an earlier meeting with Black Kettle, Maj. Wynkoop, and Governor Evans.<sup>95</sup>

While a collection of sources was used to collect the description of the Sand Creek Massacre during the preface, the following is a singular, though indicative, description:

“In going over the battle-ground the next day, I did not see a body of a man, woman, or child but what was scalped, and, in many instances, their bodies were mutilated in a most horrible manner--men, women, and children's privates cut out, &c. I heard one man say that he had cut a woman's private parts out, and had them for exhibition on a stick. I heard another man say that he had cut the fingers off of an Indian, to get the rings on his hand. According to the best of my knowledge and belief, these atrocities that were committed were with the knowledge of Col. J. M. Chivington, and I do not know of him taking any measures to prevent them. I heard of one instance of a child a few months old being thrown into the feed-box of a wagon, and, after being carried some distance, left on the ground to perish. I also heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females, and stretched them over their saddle-bows, and some of them over their hats.”

- James D. Cannon<sup>96</sup>

The descriptions of the aftermath of the Sand Creek Affair do not offend only modern sensibilities and values. Three different federal investigations were initiated within a few months of the incident. The House of Representatives Committee on the Conduct of War issued a report which found it difficult to believe that the men would be

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<sup>94</sup> Alvin M. Josephy Jr. *The Civil War in the American West*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991): 305.

<sup>95</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 79-83

<sup>96</sup> Senate, “Sand Creek Massacre,” *Report of the Secretary of War, Sand Creek Massacre*, Sen. Exec. Doc. No. 26, 39 Cong., 2 sess. (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1867): 129.

found “disgracing the uniform of United States soldiers and officers” or could “commit... such acts of cruelty and barbarity as are detailed in the testimony.”<sup>97</sup> The House of Representatives’ investigation ended with the Chairman demanding that those “guilty of those brutal and cowardly acts” be punished, in order to uphold the “honor of the nation.”<sup>98</sup>

Also present in the report was a reference to the bodies of the Hungate family being displayed in Denver, with the report arguing that “the bodies of persons killed at a great distance -- whether by the Indians or not is not certain -- were brought to the capital of the Territory and exposed to the public gaze, for the purpose of inflaming still more the already excited feeling of the people.”<sup>99</sup>

And here again the people in the Colorado territory seem to be at odds with the federal government. Territory articles, editorials, and books were published following these events that defended Chivington’s actions and character, and argued for the moral necessity of defending the Colorado territory via extermination.<sup>100</sup> The *Rocky Mountain News* was especially supportive. Before receiving the particulars of the battle, they reported “Five hundred Indians are reported killed...” and ended their article with “Bully

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<sup>97</sup> “OUR INDIAN TROUBLES.; Report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War on the Massacre of Cheyenne Indians.” *New York Times*, July 23, 1865. Pp. 2 <http://www.nytimes.com/1865/07/23/news/our-indian-troubles-report-committee-conduct-war-massacre-cheyenne-indians.html?pagewanted=2>

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Indeed, it is likely that the Hungate family was killed by Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, however, as referenced earlier, Cheyenne governance structure being complicated and less hierarchical than U.S. structure, and the lack of any of these soldiers at Black Kettle’s encampment means that there is an immense failure of connection between the murder of the Hungate family and the Sand Creek Massacre. *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 21-24; Irving Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region: Including an Account of the Battle of Sand Creek, and of Occurrences in El Paso County, Colorado, during the War with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, in 1864 and 1868* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1914): 114-186.

for the Colorado boys!”<sup>101</sup> In a similar article the next day, the *Daily Mining Journal* implied that Col. Chivington had not gone far enough and, despite his failed run for

Congress, might make better friends in Colorado by attacking more Cheyenne villages:

“The people of Colorado will see renewed cause of thankfulness that they did not send Colonel Chivington to Congress since he appears to have again turned his attention to military matters. One more such blow, as of the avenging angel, inflicted upon the Devil’s own songs of the Plains, will quite reconcile us to Colonel Chivington. . . Two more such blows will make us warm admirers of the Methodist Colonel and if by any happy chance of fortune, he should be able to inflict three more, making in all a neat sum of 2,000 killed, the Journal will become his fast friend and support him for any office within the gift of the people of Colorado, at any time in the future for he will be worthy to be called her temporal savior.”<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, the *Rocky Mountain News* later attacked the *Daily Mining Journal* after the *Journal* implied that the slander against Soule, who held his troops back during the violence at Sand Creek, was in part instigated by the *Rocky Mountain News*.<sup>103</sup> The *Rocky Mountain News* wrote that the *Journal* was,

“ever ready to excuse, justify or apologize for [Indian] acts... It thinks their stories repeated from mouth to mouth, through half-breeds, Indian traders, and sympathizers like itself, are far more reliable... than can be statements of a respectable white man, or the official reports of a sworn officer. There is the difference. Our sympathies are upon the side of the white man, and between the two stories, we incline to believe his. *The Journal is exactly against us. It favors the indians, excuses the Indians, justifies the Indians, believes the Indians.*”<sup>104</sup>

This dichotomous thinking, which pits sympathizers, traders, “half-breeds,” and moderates among the “enemy” is reflected in genocidal violence throughout history.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 21.

<sup>102</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 22.

<sup>103</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 27

<sup>104</sup> Emphasis mine. Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 28.

<sup>105</sup> Again, examples are Germany’s Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy, moderate Hutus being attacked in Rwanda, and German socialists and communists being targeted prior to the expansion to other identity

Further, it is reflected in Sémelin's theory which states that in times of danger the human mind immediately separates friends from enemies.

While the *Rocky Mountain News* remained fervent supporters of Col. Chivington and the "Bloody Thirdsters," newspapers in the east began to follow the narrative of the federal government.<sup>106</sup> Reporting about Indians, and Indian-settler conflict in general, however, remained a continuation of the malaise that accompanied articles about "Indian depredations" in the west.<sup>107</sup>

There also seems to be little evidence that Kiernan's cults of agrarianism or antiquity played an important role. Of course, the racism that represents one of the pillars of Kiernan's thesis is present, but the reasoning for the violence at Sand Creek seems to be explained almost entirely and directly by these fears. There is no evidence that Chivington wanted to massacre Black Kettle's band because they were hunter gatherers or to return to a gloried past of any kind. He was acting on the will of a populace caught in fear mongering and disgust. There is also little evidence that Chivington was attempting to engage in an attack on insurgents hiding among civilian populations. Chivington said "I have come to kill Indians, and it is right and honorable to use any

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groups in Nazi Germany.

<sup>106</sup> "INDIAN AFFAIRS.; Col. Chivington's Action Disapproved by the Government The Tribes Invited to a Council." *New York Times*, August 9, 1865. <http://www.nytimes.com/1865/08/09/news/indian-affairs-col-chivington-s-action-disapproved-government-tribes-invited.html>

<sup>107</sup> "INDIAN DEPREDATIONS.; Emigrant Trains Robbed on the Santa Fe Road." *New York Times*, August 4, 1864. <http://www.nytimes.com/1864/08/04/news/indian-depredations-emigrant-trains-robbed-on-the-santa-fe-road.html>; "THE INDIAN CAMPAIGN.; Preparations for a Vigorous War The Draft in Kansas." *New York Times*. March 31, 1865. <http://www.nytimes.com/1865/03/31/news/the-indian-campaign-preparations-for-a-vigorous-war-the-draft-in-kansas.html>.

means under God's heaven to kill Indians," and based on his actions it seems as though he can be taken at his word.<sup>108</sup>

Subnational representatives acting on fears of purity and threat, to the shock of national actors, are clearly present in the Sand Creek Massacre. Sémelin's anxieties of identity, purity, and security are highly present at all levels of U.S. society before and after the Sand Creek Massacre. In particular, subnational actors, such as newspapers, editorialists, and military volunteers, were calling for extermination or ethnic cleansing of indigenous people throughout the time period. And yet, this type of mass killing was unseen on the Great Plains outside of direct military action where the perpetrators were given permission to engage in killing by an authority who was said to embody national power. As will be seen, this type of militia and grass-roots killing ended up being relatively rare in the Great Plains. The immediate condemnation of the U.S. federal government may be responsible for this reduction in ideologically inspired mass killings. This seems to give power to Straus's hypothesis that genocide may be a unique form of violence perpetrated primarily by the will of national actors.

Lastly, as shown by the swift investigation and condemnation by the federal government, there is clear difference in national and subnational action and strategic desire. These differences continued throughout the history of conflict on the Great Plains, but did not change the federal government's overall strategy of military and political conquest of the Great Plains. The massacre at Sand Creek is representative of the complicated relationship between the people of the United States and the ongoing genocide of the Native Americans. In the territories, many people and newspapers saw

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<sup>108</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 86-87.

Sand Creek as a military success and a strong handed response to the threat of Indian depredations. And yet, although Sand Creek is used by many theorists as emblematic of the Native American genocide, within months the events at Sand Creek were publicly condemned in three investigations by the U.S. government and newspapers in the east. The Sand Creek Massacre is not the only example of massacre on the Great Plains, though it may be the best example of massacre through incitement of hatred and insecurity.

### Washita River – 1868

“It will be a very hard thing to leave the country that God gave us. Our friends are buried there, and we hate to leave these grounds... This is hard on us. There at Sand Creek – White Antelope and many other chiefs lie there ; our women and children lie there... I do not feel disposed to go right off to a new country and leave them.”

- Little Raven<sup>109</sup>

Four years after the attack on Sand Creek, almost to the day, Black Kettle’s camp would be attacked again. This time the attack would not be led by volunteers, but by the famous Lieutenant Colonel George Custer, acting on behalf of General Sheridan.<sup>110</sup> Between the two attacks the federal government had negotiated the Medicine Lodge Treaty between the United States and the southern Plains nations, which stipulated that the Southern Cheyenne and Arapahoe were to stay south of the Arkansas. From the U.S. perspective, compliance to the treaty would mean peace. Again, Cheyenne governance structure prevented this perspective from being as strictly true and effective as the U.S.

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<sup>109</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 100.

<sup>110</sup> In 1866 General Tecumseh Sherman, famous for his “March to the Sea” was promoted to General of the Army. He promoted Sheridan to Lieutenant General, and Grant made Sheridan head of the Department of the Missouri in 1867.

government wanted it to be. Three or four hundred Cheyennes were, at the time of the signing, following Roman Nose north, in refusal of the treaty.<sup>111</sup> Over the next year annuities, arms, and ammunition that had been promised by the treaties were slow coming, and many young Cheyenne and Arapahoe men refused to accept the white federal government's artificial boundaries or adopt white settler ways.<sup>112</sup> As attacks and depredations in defiance of the treaty increased, a new peace commission assembled in Chicago, but an absence of key civilian votes gave Sherman and the army a majority.<sup>113</sup> They used this opportunity to increase army authority, and push for a more aggressive federal Indian policy.<sup>114</sup> Sherman's principal argument was, "either the Indians must give way, or we must abandon all west of the Missouri River, and confess. . . that forty millions of whites are cowed by a few thousand savages."<sup>115</sup>

At the time, the attitude of the settlers in the territories was similar, and had changed little since Sand Creek. Ongoing Indian raids were a danger to settlers and a threat to the ongoing construction of the railroad. In response to these attacks Sheridan gave orders to, "proceed south in the direction of the Antelope Hills, thence toward the Washita River, the supposed winter seat of the hostile tribes; to destroy their villages and ponies, to kill or hang all warriors, and bring back all women and children."<sup>116</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>111</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 162.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy 1865-1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988): 130.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>116</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 168.

over the course of the fall, many of the young men and Dog Soldiers who had raided settler and military outposts had come to winter with Black Kettle along the Washita River in Oklahoma. There was now a strategic reason to attack Black Kettle's camp. The United States wanted to capture and contain the wintering Dog Soldiers who had, in the view of the United States, violated the Medicine Lodge Treaty for the whole of the Cheyenne nation.

Custer was instructed to attack the camp on the Washita River, and knowing the superior mobility of Cheyenne military and non-combatants, Custer split his command into multiple companies to most effectively prevent escape. Custer's troops attacked from four directions, rather than advancing over the ford as Black Kettle expected him to do.<sup>117</sup> Custer's troops destroyed Black Kettle's village, captured 53 women and children, and marched north to avoid the retaliatory attacks by allied Kiowa and Comanche.<sup>118</sup>

An historical analysis shows that the attack on Washita, unlike Sand Creek, was not done in the hopes of an easy victory over non-combatants or to kill as many native people as possible. The reasons why Sheridan chose to attack the camp on Washita has a great deal to do with both Sheridan's conception of military victory and the realities of engaging in battle with Plains Indian forces. Wooster makes the point in his analysis of military policy that:

“Large groups of Indians usually scattered shortly after discovering bluecoats nearby. Officers consequently found it extremely difficult to force Indians to fight pitched battles, where the army's discipline and organization could be decisive. To

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 169.



preclude the possibility of such dispersals, ambitious officers sought to surprise, encircle, and attack large Indian camps when discovered.”<sup>119</sup>

In fact, Custer would use similar strategies against Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull’s forces during the Battle of the Greasy Grass, albeit to disastrous results. In both cases, the goal of capturing non-combatants was secondary to defeating a supremacy threatening insurgency. That said, the fact that non-combatants were present didn’t dissuade the military either. General Sherman, fresh from the Civil War, certainly felt strongly that one needed to attack the homes and villages of enemies saying,

“If a village is attacked and women and children killed, the responsibility is not with the soldiers but with the people whose crimes necessitated the attack. During the [Civil] war did any one [sic] hesitate to attack a village or town occupied by the enemy because women or children were within its limits? Did we cease to throw shells into Vicksburg or Atlanta because women and children were there?”<sup>120</sup>

This is all firmly in line with Valentino and Ulfelder’s findings that during wars against counterinsurgency, the chance of mass killing, and the targeting of noncombatants in particular, is greatly increased. Even Dee Brown, who places the events of Washita firmly in the area of massacre, makes the point that the non-combatants were killed when the effort to separate warriors from old men, women, and children was too “slow and dangerous for the cavalrymen.”<sup>121</sup> The battle also differs from Sand Creek in key ways. A high number of non-combatants were kept as prisoners of

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<sup>119</sup> Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy 1865-1903*, 165-166.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>121</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 169.

war, and often for the express purpose of dissuading violence.<sup>122</sup> While the practice of using women and children as attack dissuading human shields is morally suspect, the intention in this case was not to expressly exterminate the non-combatants, nor to use them in combat. Custer's goal was to prevent military conflict with opponents who were, at that moment, superior in combat and numbers, and in general far better equipped to engage in a prolonged and protracted conflict on the boundless expanse of the Great Plains.

This intention is corroborated by Custer in his memoirs, where he expressed that he was numerically unequipped to engage with the Southern Cheyenne, and chose instead to adopt "proper precautions" so that the "Indians would not molest" his troops.<sup>123</sup>

"Indians contemplating a battle, either offensive or defensive, are always anxious to have their women and children removed from all danger thereof. By our watchfulness we intended to let the Indians see that there would be no opportunity for them to take us by surprise, but that if fighting was intended, it should not all be on one side. For this reason I decided to locate our camp as close as convenient to the village, knowing that the close proximity of their women and children, and their necessary exposure in case of conflict, would operate as a powerful argument in favor of peace, when the question of peace or war came to be discussed."<sup>124</sup>

By keeping the hostages within the troops, Custer sought to effectively ward off counter attack.<sup>125</sup> This strategically minded viewpoint is not at odds with the virulent racism that accompanied any campaign against indigenous people, but it does present evidence that suggests that the Washita massacre falls more in line with a strategy of war

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<sup>122</sup> George Armstrong Custer. *My Life on the Plains: Personal Experiences with Indians*. (New York: Sheldon and Company; 1874): 220.

<sup>123</sup> Custer, *My Life on the Plains*, 220.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Jerome A. Greene. *Washita: The U.S. Army and the Southern Cheyenne, 1867-1869*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2004): 127-128

than an ideological effort to exterminate a specific group of people. Less present were Sémelin or Kiernan's theories of racial superiority. Custer was no fool, he knew that the Cheyenne had military superiority, both in numbers and strategy. His actions were *based* on this understanding of Cheyenne superiority, not an active denial of it. There was also little push for the destruction of a contaminant or impurity, nor a clear emphasis on antiquity or agrarianism, which shows little evidence for important tenets of both Sémelin and Kiernan's theories. Sémelin's emphasis on threat and security, however, is present, and informs the desire to attack the Cheyenne. This emphasis does not explain the killing of noncombatants as effectively as Valentino et al.'s research on counterinsurgency does, however.

Furthermore, it was the military officers who lived and fought in the territories who tended towards more violent response to the "Indian problem." On the ground officers and generals were given a greater say during the Chicago meeting, and pushed militarized solutions. This suggests that officers familiar with the insurgency tactics common on the Great Plains were pushing tactical agenda, and that national desires had less strength in controlling military action at the time. National actors, of course, did not have as much influence or control over military officers in the territories.

A final important element to note when addressing non-combatant casualties on the plains is the difference in winter military capacities between the Confederate States and the Plains Indians. While the winter campaigns in the south were effective, they were also directed against an enemy who knew its family was safe at home and could fight effectively in both the winter and the summer. Plains Indian soldiers traditionally did not fight in the winter because they wintered with their families and other non-combatants,

and relied on grazing for their horses, rather than supply lines and grains.<sup>126</sup> Thus, while the outcome of this winter campaign did not include any decisive battles and may have been more oriented towards the defeat of an enemy considered to be using insurgency tactics, the campaign remained psychologically and economically devastating for the Southern Cheyenne and their allies.<sup>127</sup>

### Marias River – 1870

One massacre which seems to garner less attention by histories than many of the others presented here is the Piegan Blackfeet massacre at the bend of the Marias River. The massacre has roots in an event far more innocuous, a dispute between a Pikuni man, Owl Child, and a white settler, Malcom Clarke. In brief, horses were stolen, names were called, Owl Child was beaten and publicly humiliated, and Clarke was killed in revenge. The settlers were furious, beseeching the United States to come and protect them from Indian depredations. The army, however, did not immediately respond with military action. Instead they sent General Sully to meet with four peace chiefs of the Blackfeet Nation and received their assurance that Owl Child, who was an outcast among most Blackfeet bands and wintered with Mountain Chief, would be given up to the United States as soon as possible.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Wooster notes that limited Confederate resources did cause great hardships for their soldiers, but they also proved dangerous in winter combat, and their non-combatants were relatively safe and were unlikely to “undergo the horrors of a torturous winter chase.” Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy 1865-1903*, 140.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 133, 136.

<sup>128</sup> James Welch. *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994): 30

When the timeframe given to the chiefs to turn over Owl Child came and passed, Gen. Sheridan outfitted four companies of cavalry and sent Colonel Baker north.<sup>129</sup> Gen. Sheridan again chose a winter campaign, knowing the effectiveness of these campaigns against indigenous foes. His orders to Col. Baker were, “If the lives and property of the citizens of Montana can best be protected by striking Mountain Chief’s band, I want them struck. Tell Baker to strike them hard.”<sup>130</sup> Baker’s orders, however, applied only to Mountain Chief’s band, and Gen. Sully had given the other chiefs papers of safe conduct for their movements and wintering in the Montana territory.<sup>131</sup> To this end, a half-Pikuni scout known as Raven Quiver traveled with Col. Baker to ensure the mission went smoothly.<sup>132</sup>

When Baker arrived at what he believed to be Mountain Chief’s camp he surrounded it and prepared to attack at dawn. Upon seeing the painted designs on the buffalo skin lodges, Raven Quiver realized the camp was, in fact, Heavy Runner’s winter camp, and went immediately to Baker to inform him that it was the wrong camp. Baker replied, “That makes no difference, one band or another of them; they are all Piegans [Pikunis] and we will attack them.”<sup>133</sup> The resulting attack left 173 dead, almost entirely women and children.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Baker may have been drunk at the time. This was not an uncommon occurrence among military men at the time, even on campaign. Although all the histories make note of it, in the end, drunk or not, Baker insisted on an underlying belief that all Pikuni were the same and attacked Mountain Chief’s camp. Ibid.

The attitude of the settlers in the territory was similar to their attitude toward the other massacres so far examined. Newspapers endorsed the actions of Baker and argued that the massacre would provide “future peace and security.”<sup>134</sup> Similar to the reactions to Chivington after Sand Creek, many frontier newspapers saw the act as punishment for “nameless mutilations” and “atrocities.”<sup>135</sup> Back east, however, the attitude was one of horror and shame. Congressmen were quick to condemn the violence stating “[This system of warfare] cannot be justified here or before the country; it cannot be justified before the civilization of the age, or in the sight of God or man” and “... there is no warrant in the laws of God or of man for destroying women and children merely because their husbands and fathers may be marauders. I say that civilization shudders at horrors like this.”<sup>136</sup> The Chicago Tribune joined the cry saying “there is nothing in the records of the Indian Office which surpasses the atrocities detailed in this paper.”<sup>137</sup> The events at Sand Creek seemed to have effectively faded from mind. One congressman, who may have stood alone, supported Baker’s actions, and called for a war of extermination.<sup>138</sup>

Despite this outcry, Gen. Sheridan and Col. Baker managed to avoid punishment. Gen. Sheridan was close to Gen. Sherman, and wrote to him with vivid descriptions of rapes and “scalped and mutilated” corpses by the hundreds, which he could not give names to out of “delicacy.”<sup>139</sup> Sherman passed the buck to the Interior Department, and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 36.

the U.S. Army's internal investigation found Sheridan and Baker innocent.<sup>140</sup> This did prompt extreme reform of the Indian Bureau, however, which came to be known as "Grant's Peace Policy," the goal of which was to put more Quakers and religious groups in charge of Indian policy.

This massacre provides some evidence for Sémelin and Kiernan's theses regarding racial superiority. Col. Baker chose to engage in the attack because "they are all Piegans," though his orders were clear that attacking Heavy Runner's camp was not his task. He argued that his actions conformed to national orders, and that he was not acting out of a fear of security or impurity. Security fears, however, explicitly drove the sentiments of the settlers who demanded his actions. On multiple subnational levels, security and racial fears contributed to Col. Baker's actions on the Marias River. On more national levels, the instructions to attack Mountain Chief at his winter camp were born out of realistic understandings of defeating an enemy that relied on insurgency tactics, in addition to settler driven security fears. Mountain Chief's camp, however, was not attacked. Col. Baker's personal actions were born out of racism. The resulting massacre was clearly more in line with an ideological desire to exterminate an enemy, and not in line with efforts to protect against counterinsurgency. This was true regardless of Gen. Sheridan's attempts to defend Col. Baker using the logic of counterinsurgency.

This massacre also elucidates the subnational and national divide in dealing with military conflicts. Multiple generals worked more and less effectively to ensure the safety of bands deemed "non-hostile," using papers of safe conduct and scouts who were

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

familiar with the cultures targeted. Further, the army represented both sides of the subnational/national divide. There was Baker acting on personal, rather than superior, orders, and attacking a camp that he was told was friendly. Then his actions were backed by national actors such as Sheridan and Sherman. Regardless, national policy again sought to avoid situations like this in the future through Grant's peace policy.<sup>141</sup>

### Wounded Knee - 1890

When we get warning from heaven;  
Then the angels will come;  
Then the wonderful bells will ring;  
Then our souls will be ready;  
Then they will go up to heaven;  
Then we will sing with Jesus;  
Then we will be happy with Jesus.

Song of Heaven<sup>142</sup>

“You must not fight. Do no harm to anyone. Do right always.”

- Wovoka<sup>143</sup>

In some ways, the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre is a surprising choice for an official “end” to the Plains Indian Wars. Independent indigenous sovereignty over any

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<sup>141</sup> A similar massacre, known as the Battle of Ash Hollow, would result in a great deal of women and children killed similarly, with indiscriminate firing into lodges and hiding areas. The Battle of Ash Hollow won't be explored in depth because of its ambiguous place between battle and massacre, and due to its similarities to the previously explored Washita. The justification for the attack was punitive, and a response to the massacre of American troops who had opened fire on a village a year before. My initial analysis placed somewhere near Marias and Washita, with security fears accompanying it, and strategic justification and purpose attempting to explain it.

<sup>142</sup> James Mooney. *The Ghost Dance Religion and Wounded Knee*. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1973), 755.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* 777.



part of the Great Plains officially ended in 1877, shortly after Crazy Horse's surrender. This marked the end of the Great Sioux War, when the United States used the Agreement of 1877 to annex the last remaining Sioux lands and establish a smaller, non-independent Sioux reservation.<sup>144</sup> 1877 also marked the end to organized military resistance by the Sioux. Still, the Wounded Knee massacre is seen as the conclusive end of indigenous resistance towards U.S. sovereignty over the Great Plains.<sup>145</sup> The event marked a violent end to the ongoing military conflicts between the two nations, despite occurring thirteen years after the end of official Sioux military engagement. Because of this violent end, the Wounded Knee Massacre remains a powerful and lasting image in the history of the genocide of indigenous people in the United States.

Just prior to the Wounded Knee massacre, many indigenous communities, particularly on the Great Plains, had taken strongly to a syncretic Christian religious movement. The movement, led by a Paiute man named Wovoka, promised the disappearance of the whites, and the subsequent end to white rule, through nonviolent resistance and a spiritual dance referred to by white settlers as "the Ghost Dance." The Ghost Dance was particularly popular among the Sioux, no doubt due to the relatively recent loss of independence over their lands. As the Ghost Dance spread throughout the Sioux reservations "almost all other activities came to a halt."<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Sitting Bull would remain in resistance for another four years, albeit in Canada, before surrendering to the United States and remaining on the reservation.

<sup>145</sup> There were several small skirmishes between some Sioux and the U.S. government after Wounded Knee, however they would mark the end of organized military resistance between Sioux peoples and the U.S. government. One final exception may be the 1973 declaration of an independent Sioux nation in the town of Wounded Knee.

<sup>146</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 435.

“No pupils appeared at the schoolhouses, the trading stores were empty, no work was done on the little farms. At Pine Ridge the frightened agent telegraphed Washington: ‘Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. . . . We need protection and we need it now. The leaders should be arrested and confined at some military outpost until the matter is quieted, and this should be done at once.’”<sup>147</sup>

While involved only by implicit acceptance, Sitting Bull was named as a “fomentor of disturbance” by agents in the field.<sup>148</sup> Assumed to be actively fostering discontent by the Indian Bureau, Sitting Bull was arrested at the Standing Rock Reservation. Though he went with Reservation Police willingly, Ghost Dancers protested and resisted his arrest at his house. This prompted a confrontation in which Sitting Bull was killed.<sup>149</sup> Out of fear of reprisal, hundreds of leaderless Hunkpapa Sioux fled from Standing Rock, seeking refuge elsewhere. Some arrived at the camp of Spotted Elk (also known as Big Foot). Spotted Elk was also on the list of “fomenters of disturbances” and had been ordered to be arrested. Spotted Elk decided to move his band of Minneconjou with the Hunkpapa who had arrived, to the Pine Ridge Reservation. He hoped that Red Cloud might protect him from an end similar to Sitting Bull’s.<sup>150</sup>

As they moved west, Spotted Elk’s band was met by four columns of U.S. cavalry, and was escorted by this cavalry for five miles to Wounded Knee Creek. Spotted Elk’s band slept under the scope of not only the soldiers and their weapons, but four Hotchkiss guns,<sup>151</sup> which were set up on the slope above them. The following morning

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 435-436.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>149</sup> For an interesting account on how this incident has affected Sioux culture and family ties to this day, read *Neither Wolf Nor Dog* by Kent Nerburn.

<sup>150</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 440.

<sup>151</sup> 42mm light machine guns.

the soldiers surrounded the Minneconjou camp, and demanded all weapons be turned over. After issuing breakfast hardtack and disarming Spotted Elk's band, the soldiers "were not satisfied with the number of weapons surrendered and... searched the tents."<sup>152</sup> They found only two additional guns, one of which was owned by a young, deaf Minneconjou named Black Coyote. Black Coyote had bought the gun and either misunderstood the intent of the soldiers or resisted giving up his Winchester rifle. It is unclear who fired the first shot, but the response was a swift and destructive attack by the U.S. forces using their rifles and machine guns against the unarmed Minneconjou. Between 150 and 300 of the 350 Minneconjou and Hunkpapa who were gathered with Spotted Elk were killed. Twenty-five soldiers were killed, and thirty-nine wounded, although many of these are estimated to have been struck by friendly fire.<sup>153</sup>

There is hardly a unified explanation as to why the massacre occurred, although it seems unlikely that the massacre was "a regrettable, tragic accident of war... for which neither side as a whole may be properly condemned" as expressed by authors such as Robert Utley.<sup>154</sup> Most pressingly, the United States and the Sioux nation<sup>155</sup> were not at war. It is also unlikely that a band made up mostly of women and children, led by a very sick chief, would engage in a pitched battle with no weapons in the center of their camp, in the middle of winter. It is equally unlikely they would choose to simply ignore the soldiers' superiority of arms and four light machine guns aimed towards the lodges.

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<sup>152</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 442.

<sup>153</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 444.

<sup>154</sup> Robert Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*. (New Haven: Yale University, 1963): 230.

<sup>155</sup> The cultural, rather than the political, body at the time.

The fact that the United States and the Sioux nation were not at war makes the hypothesis that this was a violent tactical response to counterinsurgency unlikely. That said, there was a clear *fear* that the Ghost Dance would encourage the Sioux nation to rise up, which historically had meant guerilla attacks on both civilian and military outposts throughout the west. Newspapers as far away as New York were reporting on the Ghost Dance as an Indian practice to “work themselves up to fighting pitch” (Cite B). They were allegedly “armed with Winchesters and side arms” and “well supplied with ammunition.”<sup>156</sup> General Brooke informed the War Department that a body of “300 Rosebud warriors” had appeared “as if they had risen out of the earth,” all armed with “Winchesters and plenty of ammunition.”<sup>157</sup> Rumors circulated that settlers in North Dakota were “abandoning their ranches and farms” out of fear, “Indians were armed with ‘Custer’s rifles, which had never been found,’” and “local hardware men had sold out all their ammunition to the Indians.”<sup>158</sup> In reality, there were no efforts by the Sioux to prepare any number of soldiers for combat. Given the historic difficulty of indigenous resisters to procure ammunition at the best of times when they were able to freely trade

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<sup>156</sup> “It Looks More Like War: The Northwestern Indians Becoming Very Aggressive. A Letter of Defiance Sent Yesterday - The Ghost Dances Continue - The Probably Battle Ground.” *New York Times*. November 23, 1890. Pp. 5  
<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1890/11/23/106044883.html?pageNumber=5>

<sup>157</sup> While not covered in this thesis, the Battle of the Rosebud was a thorough victory by Crazy Horse against Gen. Crooke, and the largest united gathering of Sioux warriors in history. It occurred only days before the Battle of Little Bighorn, another Sioux victory that would include the defeat of the idolized Custer. The implication here is that the warriors are not only well armed and supplied, but also highly capable, dangerous, and knowledgeable enough to defeat two fully equipped U.S. army regiments within a few days of each other. More than capable of causing devastation along the Dakota frontiers. “Dancers Threaten to Shoot: The Wounded Knee Fanatics Are Ready to Fight.” *New York Times*. November 23, 1890. Pp. 5. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1890/11/23/106044884.html?pageNumber=5>

<sup>158</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 114.

for and buy ammunition from traders across the Great Plains, it is also unlikely that they were well supplied with weapons and a great deal of ammunition.

Of course, the newspapers contributed not only to a sense of fear and intimidation, but also to a general disgust for Sioux people. One report stated that the dance they saw incited the consumption of raw meat, hallucination, and cannibalism:

“They kill several steers and eat them raw, drink and gorge themselves to make up for their fast. At last Friday’s dance one of the braves was to go into a trance and remain in this condition four days. At the close of this period he was to come to life as a buffalo- he would still have the form of a man, but he would be a buffalo. They were then to kill the buffalo, and every Indian who did not eat a piece of him would become a dog. The man who was turned into a buffalo was perfectly willing, and I suppose they have killed and eaten him by this time.”<sup>159</sup>

To be clear, the Ghost Dance was not a preparation of war or an effort to incite rebellion or violence. Indeed, the very basis of the movement centered around the Christian faith, with Wovoka encouraging Native Americans to profess their faith in the Christian God, farm, and send their children to school.<sup>160</sup> This, like earlier events against the Cherokee, encourages a critical look at Kiernan’s thesis that the agrarian romance was key to the racism and violence perpetrated against indigenous people in the United States. The cause of the massacre seems to be far more connected to a fear of renewed insurgency and racism centered around threatening and impure indigenous people. The allegation that raw meat was being consumed and cannibalism was occurring seems to reinforce the fear of impurity and inhumanity, while the fear of another uprising put the

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<sup>159</sup> “To See Their Messiah. The Indians Strive in Their Dances to Produce Unconsciousness.” *New York Times*. November 22, 1890. Pp.2.  
<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1890/11/22/103280512.html?pageNumber=2>

<sup>160</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 113.

United States on edge. Again, this seems to support Sémelin's thesis as a more effective way to theorize genocide.

Except in the ways that the massacre falls in line with fears of security, it does not support Valentino et al's counterinsurgency reasoning. Still, the fear of an insurgency appearing again did drive the actions by the military. This suggests that security fears and the threat of counterinsurgency may be closely linked, and may provide reasoning to commit violence even in the absence of an actual insurgency, although Valentino et al's research suggests this is unlikely.

In the 1870s, the nation, led by President Grant, adopted a "peace policy." While this policy was not entirely effective at preventing either violence or genocidal practices, it was further intent by the U.S. government to avoid *mass killings*. In short, Chivington, Sheridan, Miles, and their ilk, failed to successfully convince the nation to engage in the "extermination policy." This gives strength to the theory that the violence that occurred at Wounded Knee was a response to the perceived *threat* of war, as opposed to extermination oriented ideology. This also supports Sémelin's thesis that fear and insecurity play a larger part than racism by itself can explain.

The Wounded Knee Massacre reveals the power of national ideology in times of genocide. Wounded Knee, like the other massacres on the Great Plains, did not take place on a reservation. It did, however, take place with Sioux people moving from one reservation to the other, and so is the only massacre which is related to the reservation system. This is important because it relates directly to the idea that the United States was attempting to end a military conflict with an insurgency oriented enemy, and not to use military means to exterminate this enemy. If they had been extermination oriented due to

ideology and policy, we would expect to see more examples of military violence on the reservations. The reservations were the only place the military could effectively end the superior mobility of the Plains Indians peoples, and thereby keep them in one place.

## CHAPTER III

### GENOCIDE BY ANY OTHER MEANS

“She asked, ‘your hair’s really pretty, what are you?’  
And I said, ‘thank you. I’m Lakota, I’m Native American.’  
She looked at me confused, and she said, ‘aren’t you guys extinct?’”  
- Frank Waln<sup>161</sup>

While this thesis seeks to examine mass killings, as they tend to be the focus of modern theories of genocide, the relative uncommonness of mass killings on the Great Plains compared to other genocides creates a sort of paradox. Given that genocide occurred on the plains, and that genocide is primarily theorized using mass killings, and that over virtually the entire period within which the massacres take place the national government was not committed to an extermination policy, how was the genocide carried out? On the plains, most deaths were caused by the destruction of livelihood and agriculture, withholding of resources by corruption in the Indian Bureau, and the forced theft of children who were sent to boarding schools.

#### Economic Devastation and the Extermination of the Buffalo

First, let's us examine the economic devastation. It is important to recognize the importance of the buffalo to Plains Indian cultures, but in terms of livelihood and civil health, it is perhaps more important to recognize how their *economies* centered around the buffalo. While deer and elk could provide food, shelter, and clothing for Plains nations, they were neither sufficient nor efficient enough to truly provide for the many peoples that were living on the Great Plains at the time. The population of the plains was

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<sup>161</sup> Frank Waln, “NASU Presents Frank Waln” (speech, Eugene, May 11, 2017).



able to survive thanks to the expansive buffalo herds that roamed the west before white settlement. Singular buffalo could provide as much meat as eight deer or five elk, so when the buffalo were scarce hunters were forced to be in the field constantly.<sup>162</sup> When it came to Americans, the goal of killing buffalo varied in both intent and effort. Sheridan and Sherman understood exterminating the buffalo as a way to push Indians to the reservations, and end their hunter-gatherer livelihoods.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, on the part of both officers and Indian allies, the destruction of the buffalo signaled the destruction of the Sioux. Rooster points out a quote by reporter John F. Finerty who said that when reproached for wanton buffalo slaughter, Indian allies replied “better kill buffalo than have him feed the Sioux.”<sup>164</sup>

Still, the extent to which the military sought the extermination of the buffalo as a *policy* is unclear. There are examples of concerted efforts by the military to kill the buffalo, such as Lieutenant Colonel Bradley being commanded “to kill all the buffalo we find, & drive the Arappahoes [sic] & Cheyennes south, & the Sioux north.”<sup>165</sup> There was also military encouragement of hunters killing the buffalo, such as Lieutenant Colonel Dodge pushing them to “Kill every buffalo you can! Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone.”<sup>166</sup> Still others provide examples of officers protesting the slaughter, and even

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<sup>162</sup> Marshall, *The Journey of Crazy Horse*, 172.

<sup>163</sup> Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 171-172.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>166</sup> David D. Smits, “The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883.” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 328.

Sheridan authorized an effort “to put a stop to their wholesale destruction.”<sup>167</sup> This reflected a situation where the killing of buffalo was accepted, but “few senior officers openly expressed a desire to use armed forces to exterminate the buffalo” and “several officers formally protested the wanton destruction of these animals.”<sup>168</sup>

The true devastation occurred when a new method of industrial tanning was developed in the south in 1871, and a host of hunters fell upon the plains, killing and skinning every buffalo they could find in order to sell the hides. Contrary to popular belief, it seems that economic incentive on the part of private individuals provided the impetus to destroy the great herds of buffalo on the plains, albeit with encouragement, and often a great deal of free ammunition, from the military.<sup>169</sup> This destruction of the buffalo would devastate the Plains Indian economies, and push them, by threat of starvation, to the reservations. This violence seems to be motivated almost entirely by greed and pragmatic decisions to undermine indigenous power, and does not fit neatly into any of the theories mentioned so far.

### Corruption and the Reservation System

The other side of this, of course, was the situation for plains bands that chose to abandon the nomadic lifestyle and submit to the authority, and often the will and whim, of Indian agents. Even frontier newspapers were quick to condemn the Indian Bureau and its agents for corruption, arguing that withholding federally appointed rations to

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<sup>167</sup> Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 172.

<sup>168</sup> Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 208.

<sup>169</sup> Smits, “The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo,” 332.

reservation Indians was one of the primary reasons that uprisings and depredations occurred.<sup>170</sup> The main motivation for withholding annuities was to sell the provisions granted by annuities at drastically increased prices, such that a substantial portion of the annuities would be claimed by traders and agents.<sup>171</sup> The starvation resulting from withholding federally given food is blamed for several uprisings and “outbreaks,” as well as preventing “free” Indians from settling on the reservations.<sup>172</sup> In particular, the withholding of food by Indian agents is seen as the primary cause of the Great Sioux Uprising in 1862 which resulted in the deaths of 350 white settlers, as well as 100 soldiers. Indeed, while this wasn’t the express policy of the U.S. government, the implicit acceptance of the ordeal by the U.S. government, as opposed to condemnation, gives credit to the idea that national actors accepted this behavior.

### Religion Preventing Mass Killings

Interestingly, there seems to be, in this case, some strong evidence for Michael Mann’s conclusion that “Christianity strengthened dispossession but weakened murderous cleansing.”<sup>173</sup> This deserves exploration because of the intuitive connection between religious ideology and violence, least of which might be the murderous Methodist Chivington. Despite his example, religious ideology generally seems to have been a force for the prevention of mass killings. It is clear, however, that it was not above

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<sup>170</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 8.

<sup>171</sup> Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers*, 2.

<sup>172</sup> Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 5, 6.

<sup>173</sup> Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 75.

promoting the destruction of *nativeness*, and a primary drive for the forced theft of native children and the destruction of hunter gatherer lifestyles.

In a sermon in Cleveland in 1854, Joseph Baughner Bittinger makes this exceedingly clear when he preaches against hunting freed slaves. He asked the gathered congregation if they wish to see the “*stipulated* hunting ground of the Indian become the *constitutional* hunting ground of the slave power. [Will the] savage red man and the grizzly bear... make room for the more savage white man and his human prey?”<sup>174</sup> That he might imply whites being more savage than Native Americans is interesting, but the more important part is that action defines savageness. The idea that one can become more or less savage through actions is often demonstrated by the idea that indigenous people could lose their ‘Indianness’ through reeducation and farm work.

Another common theme in religious texts and sermons was the unity of humankind, and the possibility of all races to become “civilized.” In his collection of sermons, Eli Meeker makes many of the underlying racial prejudices of his time clear, speaking about Africans as having a “silly and idiotick [sic] countenance,” while describing “some of the Europeans and the Americans in the United States” as cultivating “arts and sciences” to their “greatest perfection.”<sup>175</sup> Still, Meeker’s thesis is that despite the clear differences in physiology, humans are all one species, separated not by nature,

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<sup>174</sup> Joseph Baughner Bittinger, *A plea for humanity : a sermon preached in the Euclid Street Presbyterian Church, Cleveland, Ohio* (Cleveland, 1854): 28.

<sup>175</sup> Eli Meeker, *Sermons: on philosophical, evangelical, and practical subjects; designed for the use of various denominations of Christians* (Ithaca: Mack & Andrus, 1827): 25, 27.

but by “climate.”<sup>176</sup> He therefore establishes that all humans are brethren, and should “enjoy the same blessings” and “privileges.”<sup>177</sup>

This view is furthered in the religious response to the actions taken against the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and others in the southeast. Before the “Trail of Tears” the Cherokee had built a capital, with schools, churches, a newspaper (the bilingual Cherokee Phoenix), and a constitutionally based representative republic with a Supreme Court. The irony of their displacement was not lost to later writers, even in the 19th century, as shown by Rev. John Tighe’s essay *The Indian Question*, in which he notes the repetitive breaking of government treaties and mistreatment of native peoples throughout U.S. history.<sup>178</sup> His solution, like many religious men of his time, was religious education, with Catholicism as his particular answer. He ridiculed and condemned, however, the belief that extermination is the answer. He argued that those who believe “[Indians are] unsusceptible of civilized influences” forget the violence of the United States in the past and the “successes” of the Catholic Church in Latin America and Canada.<sup>179</sup> In effect, these religious views strongly contributed to the “civilizing” method of Indian policy, and the devastation that was caused by it. At the same time, they discouraged extermination or mass killing.

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<sup>176</sup> Meeker, *Sermons*, 29-30.

<sup>177</sup> Meeker, *Sermons*, 31-32.

<sup>178</sup> Rev. John J. Tighe, “The Indian Question” in *Essays, lectures, addresses, sermons, and miscellaneous and descriptive pieces, including a discussion on education* (Arlington, N.J.: Sacred Heart Protectory Print, 1893): 24

<sup>179</sup> Tighe, “The Indian Question,” 25-29.

One religious group that effectively avoided mass killing and genocide by other means was the Quakers. The Quakers were long seen, and saw themselves, as protectors of indigenous Americans. In 1827, an article was printed in *The friend*, a religious journal of the Quakers, which condemned the violence of the federal government, and recounted their own fair dealings with native peoples in Pennsylvania:

“Not a single act of oppression or cruelty is found chargeable to *our* forefathers.” “That so long as our religious Society exercised control in the government, or influence in its councils, so long was the soil of Pennsylvania free from the stain of Indian blood.”<sup>180</sup>

As a general rule, religion seems to encourage people to adopt a stance that leans away from massacre, although not away from lethal genocidal action, as shown by the next section.

### High Lethality Boarding Schools

Despite Quaker efforts, this emphasis on “civilizing” led to the most devastating of the genocidal tactics enacted by the federal government, the boarding school system. Simply put, the boarding schools were a system of coerced assimilation involving physical abuse, starvation, and disease. While average Americans often approach this part of U.S. history with mild remorse or reproach, Ward Churchill’s exploration of the subject provides a more damning explanation of the situation:

“Mortality rates in the schools were appalling from the outset. ... Duncan Campbell Scott<sup>181</sup> observed that, in Canada, ‘fifty percent of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education they received therein’. To place this startling proportion in proper perspective, it should be borne in mind that the death rate at the infamous Nazi concentration camp of Dachau was 36 per cent, mostly from disease. At Buchenwald, another notorious example, the rate was 19 per cent. At

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<sup>180</sup> “Volume 1, 1827” *The friend: religious and literary journal*. Philadelphia. 422pp. 80 vols. 1827-1906: 12.

<sup>181</sup> Deputy Superintendent of the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932.

Mauthausen, described by historian Michael Burleigh as exhibiting ‘the harshest regime of all concentration camps,’ the death rate was 58 per cent (again, mostly from malnutrition and attendant disease). What is known from the U.S. experience suggests that conditions and outcomes there were, at best, only marginally better than those pertaining under Scott’s regime in the north.”<sup>182</sup>

Churchill further points out that even a BIA inspector, William McConnell, “was openly denouncing the whole residential education system as embodying a policy of deliberate slaughter.”<sup>183</sup> The United States was pursuing a policy of forcibly transferring children of one group to another group,<sup>184</sup> causing serious bodily or mental harm to these children,<sup>185</sup> and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part.<sup>186</sup>

Clearly, both the reservation system, and the boarding school system, were seen as ways to separate and purify a cultural group which was seen as a dangerous out-group on the plains. Newspapers across the U.S. were comfortable painting native people as savages, and the only outcry occurred during moments of brutal massacre, not during day to day subjugation of indigenous populations. Sémelin’s hypothesis that security and purity threat are evident here, as the United States sought to subdue, contain, and assimilate the peoples of the plains. This assimilation became starvation and mass murder by disease in the boarding schools, even though these were not forgone conclusions. The

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<sup>182</sup> Ward Churchill. “Genocide by Any Other Name: North American Indian Residential Schools in Context” in *Genocide, War Crimes, and the West*. (New York : Room 400, 2004): 95-96

<sup>183</sup> Churchill, “Genocide by Any Other Name: North American Indian Residential Schools in Context,” 95-96.

<sup>184</sup> (e) in the UN definition of genocide.

<sup>185</sup> (b) in the UN definition of genocide.

<sup>186</sup> A great deal of the children died of tuberculosis, the prevention of which was well known beginning in 1882. The schools were often built “in exactly the opposite direction,” constituting (c) in the UN definition of genocide. Churchill, 96.

reservation system also presents some of the only explicit evidence supporting Kiernan's theory, where a primary desire in the reservation ideology was to convert indigenous people to farmers. The buffalo are simpler to place because they represented a straightforward way to implement Sherman's scorched earth policies. That said, they were only exterminated when their deaths were profitable to private enterprise, not as a course of policy. Therefore, they don't fit particularly well in the presented theories because their destruction wasn't a deliberate course of action. The desire to exterminate them fits more neatly into efforts to end an insurgency through destruction of the insurgent's base of support, and do little to support Sémelin or Kiernan's theses directly. The action of exterminating them, and the resulting effects on indigenous power, were a byproduct of individual greed, not genocidal or militaristic ideology.

In short, economic devastation and starvation drove Plains communities to the reservations, where they were often preyed upon by corrupt agents, prompting rebellions which were met with military violence. After the armed conflicts ended, native children were stolen and subjected to high mortality conditions, which denied their impending rights to family, health, safety, and culture.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

“Let me go. You’ve gotten me hurt.”  
- Crazy Horse<sup>187</sup>

“A tragedy has taken place on our land, and even though it did not take place on our watch, we are its inheritors, and the earth remembers.”  
- Kent Nerburn<sup>188</sup>

What does the study of the Plains Indian Wars in this context reveal? First, the threat, real or imagined, of “Indian depredations,” and the common view of white superiority and indigenous savagery, contributed vastly to settler and the white government’s thinking on how to deal with the “Indian problem.” These fears were present whether the “Indian problem” was in the form of the military conflicts or the imagined threat of racial mixture or interaction between white settlers and indigenous nations.

In simplistic terms, Table 1 and Table 2 represent the connections between massacres and genocidal tactics perpetrated by the United States and the theories examined in this thesis. The Sand Creek Massacre, and the Marias Massacre, demonstrate that fears of identity, purity, and especially insecurity, had the capacity to drive white settlers to extreme acts of violence, strongly supporting Sémelin’s thesis. The Wounded Knee Massacre seems to provide the best evidence for Sémelin’s thesis, with the strong purity components presenting themselves in articles about cannibalism and in the

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<sup>187</sup> Marshall, *The Journey of Crazy Horse*, 263.

<sup>188</sup> Kent Nerburn, *Neither Wolf nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder* (Novato: New World Library, 1994): XI

syncretism present in the Ghost Dance movement. That said, when compared to other genocides which inform theory that seeks to explain mass killing, the number of

Table 1

Driver				
	Sand Creek	Washita	Marias	Wounded Knee
Identity/Racism	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Purity	No <sup>189</sup>	No	No	Yes <sup>190</sup>
Security	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cult of Antiquity	No	No	No	No
Agrarian Romance	No	No	No	No
Counterinsurgency Tactics	No	Yes	No	To Some Extent
Most Appropriate Explanation	Sémelin	Sémelin & Counterinsurgency	Sémelin & Counterinsurgency	Sémelin

Table 2

	Buffalo	Reservations	Boarding Schools
Identity/Racism	No	Yes	“Kill the Indian” (Yes)
Purity	No	Yes	No
Security	Yes	Yes	No
Cult of Antiquity	No	No	No (Quite the opposite)
Agrarian Romance <sup>191</sup>	No	Yes	
Counterinsurgency Tactics	No	Yes	No
Most Appropriate Explanation	Counterinsurgency	Sémelin	Sémelin

<sup>190</sup> Due to the way the Ghost Dance was covered, the fears of impurity, security, and identity are clearer in the Wounded Knee example than in some of the others.

<sup>191</sup> Kiernan makes an interesting conclusion that the romance of agrarianism was a cause of violence. While it certainly seemed to contribute to ethnic conflict, I was unable to find strong evidence that it was a significant driver of the violence, in the way that counterinsurgency or fear stemming from threat or purity provided significant motivations towards either mass killing or policies that resulted in extermination. In no cases were killings committed with the express purpose of “forcing these people to farm.”

massacres on the Great Plains remains few, though the majority seem to have been driven by Sémelin's anxieties. This chart makes it appear that purity was not a significant driver of genocide on the Plains. While it is rarely expressed explicitly as a fear of impurity, it would seem that the subtext of much of the identity and racial fears seem to support fears of purity as underlying dehumanization and racism.

Still, even when the primary drive seems to be hatred or fear, the secondary drive of using strong offensive power to defeat an enemy adept at guerrilla warfare and avoiding direct battle is still present at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee. Indeed, Washita, Marias, and Gen. Crook's attacks on the Apache all demonstrate military willingness to make concerted efforts to go on the offensive and push hard, even through the night, to catch up with indigenous "foes." Due to the military successes from aggressive offensiveness, the military felt this strategy was necessary to defeat indigenous militaries in battle.<sup>192</sup> This information supports Valentino and Ulfelder's data suggesting that in some conflicts counterinsurgency tactics encourage the use of targeting non-combatants because of the difficulty in separating combatants and noncombatants. Indeed, the lack of massacre on any reservation, with the contextual exception of Wounded Knee, suggests that extermination was used only when the fear of an "Indian attack" or "Indian war" existed. An "Indian war" meant guerilla attacks on outposts, towns, and wagon trains. This certainly encouraged some soldiers to adopt a counterinsurgency method when dealing with indigenous peoples in general. This suggests that noncombatant targeting

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<sup>192</sup> Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 150.

counterinsurgency tactics may be linked to Sémelin's fears of insecurity, as was demonstrated repeatedly here.

Of course, this relies on the idea that policy insisted on forced march, offensive maneuvers. In reality, there are plenty of moments where the U.S. army held back, or moved slowly, or did not push the offensive. Such was the case during Chief Joseph's flight north with his band of Nez Perce. Whether due to poor discipline, slow lines of communication, lack of consistent policy, or design there remained sub national decision making within the U.S. military during this time period, as subordinates were given a great deal of leeway in decision making.<sup>193</sup> These subnational actors controlling military action were, of course, very clear in instances such as Sand Creek or the Marias River. They were also of paramount importance during the campaigns that were focused on counterinsurgency, however, which could fail or succeed based on an officer's willingness to pursue an offensive and direct strategy.

It is also evident that there is a clear difference between the strategic desires of national and subnational actors during this period. National actors, such as Grant and Lincoln, wanted to "solve the Indian problem" by avoiding massacre and mass killing. Their alternative was, of course, the boarding school and reservation system, where the goal was to "kill the Indian, save the man." This was clearly at odds with many people on the ground in the territories, as demonstrated by the "killing Indians deserves praise" attitude in the territories and Chivington's murderous Thirdsters. This also helps explain why the massacre at Sand Creek is so dissimilar to other massacres on the Great Plains,

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<sup>193</sup> Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 27.

and why it may not be dissimilar if compared to massacres during wars or conflicts between the United States and other indigenous nations outside of the Great Plains.

It is important to realize that the United States has not always pursued a strategy of immediate condemnation of militia led massacre. Take, for example, Vietnam, massacres of indigenous Californians, and Wounded Knee.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, the historical record suggests that the prevalence of massacre and mass killings by military or militia forces are directly linked to the will of national actors, particularly when national actors have the force to impose their will on either the military or militia volunteer actors.

The chart shows that there was also little evidence supporting Kiernan's thesis that cults of antiquity and agrarianism were integral to the genocidal enterprise. There does seem to be strong evidence that Kiernan's examples informed the ethnic conflict, however, as agrarianism as an ideal was a basis of policy from the national perspective. The other side of this was that agrarianism, when embraced, failed to protect indigenous people. As a final note, Kiernan's thesis might lead us to believe that the most fervent exterminationists would be urban editorialists celebrating agrarian romanticism, however this proved to be false in regards to the Plains Indian Wars. Urban writers tended to be far more horrified than their contemporaries in the territories.

Valentino et al. might offer an explanation as to why the territorial officers tended towards exterminationism, and the federal government tended towards "peace policy." Because the Plains Indians were a threat to territory governments, and not the government in the East, the insurgency was taken less seriously, and therefore tactically

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<sup>194</sup> Scott, Peter Dale, "Atrocity and Its Discontents: US Double-mindedness about Massacre, from the Plains Wars to Indonesia" in *Genocide, War Crimes, and the West* (New York : Room 400, 2004), pp 146-163.

targeting non-combatants was not seen as necessary to the federal government. If the Sioux had managed an attack on Boston or New York it might have signaled to the East that they had the power to endanger the federal government, and the national government may have been more ready to embrace exterminationist policies.

Thus, two conclusions can be made. First, Sémelin's theory that fears founded on identity, purity, and security lead to mass killings seems to be inadequate given the relative lack of mass killing. It is clear, however, that these very fears seemed to support much of the genocidal strategies, regardless of whether they included mass killing. Identity, purity, and security came up repeated throughout the time period as justifications to attack, subdue, and contain indigenous people. In a similar fashion, Valentino and Ulfelder help explain the remaining massacres that occurred. This may or may not encourage an effort to distinguish mass killing that occurs as counterinsurgency, and mass killing that occurs as the result of ideological strategies of war, especially since these explanations seem to inform each other on the plains.

Second, U.S. military strategy and the difference between national and subnational desires suggest that the U.S. military during this period occupied an interesting space as both a national and subnational actor. By virtue of being the U.S. military, the military acted as an agent of national strategy, however poor communication forced the War Department to rely on volunteers and the choices of individual officers. The reliance on volunteer soldiers and individual officers, especially during the Civil War, served to give a great deal of power to subnational sentiment and individual desires, where less leeway would be given to a more disciplined and centralized fighting force. This naturally suggests that the agenda of national actors is a key force in genocide, and

the extent to which they exert influence on the periphery is directly linked to whether their desires become manifest. As demonstrated here, subnational actors and national actors may share feelings towards the targeted group, but if their strategies of, in this case genocide, differ, it is the national actors who are likely to succeed in getting their strategies implemented. Intuitively, national actors have the legitimate backing of the military and legislative force.

### Future Research

This thesis, in many ways, raises more questions than it answers. For example, massacre on the Great Plains is not necessarily an ideal or explanatory way to deal with the loss of life and culture on the Great Plains, however it may fit other areas of U.S. expansion, particularly in California, Oregon, and the area East of the Mississippi. cursory research suggests that these areas had higher incidents of ideologically driven massacre, particularly in early colonial America, however a comparative study would be necessary. The reason this is important is that the historic relative lack of mass killing as a strategy on the Great Plains does not suggest that extensive massacre was an impossibility. In fact, the push by both parts of military and civilian society for extermination makes a case for the possibility of this exact occurrence. Why then, did it occur about once every six years. This is relatively rare when considering other incidents of mass killing.

Additionally, the possibility that sub nationally driven massacre was more common in California deserves attention because of the greater distance between California and the federal government. Perhaps reduced national influence might explain

a difference in tactics, if other studies also find that national ideology and power may be the primary difference between genocidal violence and other forms of mass violence. An alternative explanation for the relative lack of massacre on the plains might be the aggrandizement of Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, etc., as ‘noble savages.’ Their fame may have allowed for the horror back east, where other tribes may not have had such an advantage.<sup>195</sup>

Finally, an exploration of the question of whether the distinction between ideological massacre and counterinsurgency related massacre is worthwhile. While the goal of counterinsurgency related massacre is to wipe out a community, in whole or in part, and can therefore clearly be a tactic of genocide, it is often not as based in a worldview of extermination based on race or ethnicity (as shown by some of Custer’s thought processes), but rather in the logic of war. Still, the question may be of little use, considering the end result of mass killing of a specific targeted group of people being the same.

### Final Thoughts

I believe this research compels one to think of genocide from a holistic sense, rather than from a view of preventing mass killings. This attempt to include the rhetorical and social can be seen as undesirable because mass killing is, for the layperson and the genocide preventer, easily defined and clearly morally abject, while other forms of violence are often relegated to the category of unfortunate but less extreme. My hope is

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<sup>195</sup> Wooster points to their “large numbers” and “growing mystique,” advantages the Apache and Modoc did not have. Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 151.



an increased desire to see genocide as a practice, regardless of the emphasis on particular strategies of violence, reduced in form and frequency.

Additionally, in no way does this thesis have the goal of encouraging a step back from situations in which a group of people is calling for extermination, while another group of people is successfully combatting the strategy, such as these cases in the history of the Plains Indian Wars. As was seen, despite success in preventing frequent massacre or extermination, genocide was carried out nonetheless. The goal of this research was to encourage genocide theorists and prevention practitioners to take a careful look at areas of potential violence today, which may not be in danger of massacre or mass killings, but are in danger of violent discrimination against a certain group of people, above all if their justification is in line with “civilized ideals.” Perhaps Michael Mann’s hypothesis that modern genocide is born out of democratization gives a firm example to look out for. Despite the benefits that democratization may hold, we must be vigilant in preventing violence that may accompany it, as well as vigilant in combatting the violence accompanying any form of government, economic, religious, or social shift.

One final thought on an idea which seems to pervade many discussions about mass violence. There is a common depression that seems to strike people who hear about, but choose not to engage with or study mass killings. It seems that many people believe that the ancient ubiquitousness of genocide provides an inability to truly address and combat it, and that there is no real hope for a more peaceful future.

We must remember, however, that as a species we have a collective memory that is now spanning several thousand years. We remember the first people to codify law, to declare ethics, to push people to follow those ethics. We remember the moment that

nations began outlawing practices that have been almost eternal in function: slavery, rape, genocide. Alas, we seem to forget how extraordinary the act of outlawing these practices is. We have taken many steps to protect future generations from the horrors that mar our past, and stymie our progress in the present, but we must see those steps as hope that someday our species can move past the extreme violence which marks our history, and move forward to a future that emphasizes our cooperative, rather than isolative, tendencies.

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. “1964 June 8, Hartford Courant, Wesleyan Baccalaureate.” Speech, Hartford, Connecticut, June 8, 1964.

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