

Stories of America's Five Mightiest Native Indian Nations

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When Christopher Columbus first arrived at the New World which would later become America, he miscalculated his position and called his hosts, the people he encountered first, Indians. The Indians, on the other hand, thought that Columbus and his sailors were Gods who have come from heaven. But within a single generation the peaceful kingdom of Indians which Columbus first saw would be gone forever, wasted by disease, slavery, torture and war. This New World that Columbus found was in fact, a very ancient place that had been lived upon by people for thousands of years. The Ice Age hunters had followed the rising sun east across the land bridge from Asia to discover a continent ruled by glaciers and great-horned bison. When the ice melted, the nomadic tribes pushed southward into the green heart of the continent following the stars, seasons and the herds. These are the Native Indians. They settled down in mountain ranges and river valleys. They developed languages and customs as varied as feathers of the birds and between them they ran deep spiritual roots. And then, the settlers from Europe came in search of wealth and power.

Two million Native Indians endured four centuries of struggle before sun finally set upon their free domain. These European settlers came in wave upon wave to occupy Indian lands. In the bellies of their ships the Europeans carried horses, guns and disease and in their heart, they carried a belief in their destiny to rule the Americas from the

Atlantic to the Pacific. As the settlers pressed westward, they finally waged an absolute war against the Indians that would close the frontier forever. *The history of America is in many ways the history of American Indians.* Ironically, they gave Europeans the skills and the knowledge needed to survive in the New World. These are the stories of the five mightiest Indian nations—the Iroquois of upstate New York, the Seminoles of Florida, the Navajos of the Southwest, the Cheyenne of the Plains and the Teton Lakota of the West. These stories are only a part of American Indian history. Yet, they paint a picture of the vastness of their domain, the depth of their beliefs and hopes, and the brave defiance as they walked into the evening of their time of freedom on this earth.

The Iroquois

In upstate New York there lies a land where a hundred rivers and lakes weave through dense green forests and misty swamps. Towering above this lush landscape are the smoky heights of great Adirondack mountains. This is the land where the mighty Iroquois nation took roots. The Iroquois' were a powerful confederacy of five separate Indian nations and in their time were among the most feared and dominant Indians in North America. Their unique confederation was a model of democracy. Some have even said that parts of America's own constitution were borrowed from Iroquois' great law of peace. But the five nations of Iroquois didn't always live in peace. Before they came

together, these nations, the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga and the Seneca were often at war with each other, until by the 14th century, their killings threatened to destroy them all. At this dreadful time a great peacemaker came from the north with a message of peace. This peacemaker together with the great Mohawk chief, the Hiawatha travelled to each of the five nations to unite them together. But within this Onondaga nation there lived an evil chief named Tadodaho who initially scorned these peacemakers, but finally the peacemakers and Hiawatha solved the problem by asking him to be the new chief of this new confederacy. Tadodaho agreed and the great peace dawned. The establishment of the confederacy brought a new-found sense of security to the Iroquois. The times of peace was good, and the nature provided the people with three necessities—corns, beans and squash—to sustain them. The women of each clan were farmers and each spring they planted these three items in the fertile land, while the men hunted and fished in the forests and lakes that surrounded their land. The women had great power. The Iroquois traced their ancestry to their mother's lineage and the head mother, not the men, appointed the chiefs of each clan.

Iroquois history was recorded on wampum belts woven with beads and shells. The term *wampum* specifically refers to white marine-shell beads conformed to certain shape and size. The beads were used in the form of woven belts. For them the wampum was both the medium and the message for social communication. Every council decision and every treaty with the Whites was sealed with an exchange of wampum. The founding of the confederacy brought peace among the five nations and led to peace throughout the nations of the northeast. But in the late 1600, beaver skins were a prized commodity in Europe rivalling the Europeans' lust for gold. Realizing this,

the Iroquois sought to monopolize the trade in pelt. They played one European power against the other and dictated terms to other tribes eager to trade.

They challenged their own enemies, the Mahicans, for the right to trade exclusively with the Dutch. Then they turned their attention to north where the French were trading with the Hurons in the St. Lawrence. The Iroquois devastated the Hurons and absorbed many Hurons in their confederacy. Then they turned west toward the Erie nations. In a bloody three-year war, the Erie was defeated and was also absorbed into the confederacy. Now expanding to the south, the Iroquois encountered the Tuscarora tribes in the Carolinas. The Tuscarora were being driven from their land by the White settlers, and so the Iroquois invited them into their confederacy. The Tuscarora migrated north and became the sixth nation of the Iroquois. By the mid-1700, the great law of peace of the Iroquois was attracting the attention of the most far-sighted American colonies. Benjamin Franklin, who worked as a British envoy to the Indians, was deeply impressed with the Iroquois form of government. Many of his contribution to the US Constitution may have come from the Iroquois principles of government. In 1763, English beat the French and took control of all French holdings south of Canada. But troubles were brewing with the British colonies and soon Iroquois would be swept into the American revolution. Formerly, Iroquois had pledged to remain neutral in the revolutionary war, but a Mohawk warrior, Joseph Brant, convinced many of the Iroquois men into fight for the British.

For the first time since the great peace, Iroquois fought Iroquois. The Mohawks, the Onondaga, the Cayuga and the Seneca fought with the British, while the Oneida and the Tuscarora sided with the colonies. When the English finally fell in the 1783, the new United States of America treated the

entire Iroquois confederacy as a conquered nation, forcing the Iroquois to surrender most of their territories. Now much of the precious land that sustained their life for thousands of years was gone. And the realities of *reservation life* appeared. Drinking and idle life led to violence and fights between once proud warriors. In their poverty they were forced to sell even more of their land. The Whites had finally robbed them of their pride and dignity.

The displacement of Iroquois from their land continued. Tragically between 1830 and 1846, the US Government carried out the removal of Indians to reservations west of Mississippi. In spite of a series of land swindles and broken treaties, Iroquois managed to hold on to parts of their land in New York and Canada. By the mid-1800, the Iroquois started adapting to Whiteman's culture. A few children attended schools outside the reservation and some Iroquois found their way into the American mainstream.

The rich legacy of Iroquois still lives on. The great confederacy of six nations not only stamped its marks on American history, but also influenced the US Constitution. The Iroquois also gave the country of Canada its name from their word meaning 'community.'

The Seminoles

There lies a land of lush green forest and deep meandering swamp bordered on the east by the mighty Atlantic Ocean and on the west by the Gulf of Mexico in the great peninsula at the edge of the North American continent. This was the land of great Seminole nation, which is now Florida. It was here the Seminoles fought the long resistance to US expansion by any Indian nation. It took the US army three wars and half to subdue the defiant and proud Seminole people. To this day the Seminole remains the only Indian people

that never signed a document of surrender with the US Government.

Florida's first people, the Temecula, Calusa and other tribes were virtually wiped out by war and disease brought by the Spanish and British in the 16th and the 17th centuries. Then in the early 1700, a wave of refugees came to Florida from the north fleeing from the expanding British colonies. They were Creek Indians driven off their lands by the settlers, the African slaves, and the other Indians escaping slavery. In the lush grassland of Spanish Florida, these Indians and Blacks began to merge as one people, known as the Seminoles. Their word Seminole, meant 'runaway' or 'wild' and for many years these runaways lived together in the land in northern Florida. Blacks formed their own town side by side with the Indians, some free and some enslaved to Indian masters. Life centred around Seminole town. They worshipped the master of breaths, embodied in the sun and took their names for their clans from the world around them, names like, alligator, turtle, snakes and mares. Every summer at the harvest time the Seminole people gathered at the town square to celebrate the new year with green corn festival. After eight days of dancing, sweat baths and purification, the priest swept the old ashes from the fire pits and they started the new fire in the town square and all past grievances were forgiven.

In the warmer climate of Florida, Seminole farmers began to grow large groves of oranges and many learned the ways of horse ranching and slave holdings from the European neighbours. In 1776, the American colonies revolted against the British rule. England created chaos by proclaiming freedom to all African slaves. More and more African runaways fled south to join the Seminoles. American slave holders grew angry and nervous about the whole town of Black Indians living at their southern doorsteps. After the revolutionary

war Americans began crossing the Florida border to settle on Indian lands. Slave traders raided Seminole villages, kidnapping anyone who looked black. In 1817, the American Government sent General Andrew Jackson to down south to recapture the runaway slaves. Jackson's troops illegally crossed Spain's Florida border and burned Seminole villages, confiscated livestock and destroyed food stores. The Seminole people fought back. Their number tripled when new Creek refugees came from the north. In November 1817 the Seminoles ambushed a boat carrying women, children and 40 soldiers along Apological river, and all but 13 Whites were shot dead. This marked the beginning of the first Seminole war.

Once again, Andrew Jackson marched into Florida. Jackson and his troops destroyed more Seminole villages and the Seminoles fled further south. Jackson's victory in the first Seminole war led Spain to sign a document with the United States for the sale of Florida. The Seminoles were caroused by the United States Government to sign a treaty and repressed on a large reservation in central Florida. These new lands were swampy and unfit for farming. Wild birds and animals for hunting were scarce and Government rations were in short supply. The officer in charge of the reservation reported that they were in most miserable situation and unless the Government assisted them many of them would simply starve to death.

In this hour of desperation one warrior rose to lead the Seminoles in their second war of resistance. His name was Osceola. He soon became one of the great leaders in the American Indian history. In 1834, the Government of the United States tried to get the Seminole chiefs to sign a treaty to their removal to reservations in Oklahoma. The Government agents spread the treaty on a table and waited for the Indian chiefs to sign. Suddenly Osceola jumped up and

plunged his knife into the treaty saying, 'The only way I will sign is with this.' An Indian Government agent named Wiley Thomson arrested Osceola and he was dragged away. Osceola would soon be released from the prison and with his great skills as speaker convinced his people that they must resist. In December of 1835, Osceola ambushed and murdered the same Indian agent, Wiley Thomson, who arrested him. That same day another Seminole chief led an attack on Government troops. The army command was annihilated with only three known survivors. The massacre was a shocking defeat for the US army and, as a result, brought down the full fury of the Government. The second Seminole war began. At the end of the bloody and futile years of fighting, US had one half of its army in Florida. General Jessop called Osceola to meet under a flag of truce and then double-crossed him and threw the great leader into a prison. Three months later, the broken-hearted and severely ill, Osceola died in a prison in South Carolina.

Osceola's death was a horrible setback to the Seminole resistance and the army continued its relentless war against the people pushing the Seminoles deeper and deeper in the Florida's southern swamp and the Everglades. Perhaps only 500 Seminoles remained in Florida, nearly invisible in the deep swamps. Their land was often covered with water and they lived by hunting and gathering and by raising vegetables in small plots of land above the waterline. They built elevated homes and learned to avoid deadly water moccasin that occupied the swamp.

In 1855, in an effort to agitate the remaining Seminole people, a US Surveying party raided the garden of Billy Bowlegs, the chief. The Government agents confiscated what they could carry and burned the rest. Bowlegs led his men to armed resistance for three years but finally, outnumbered and out of resources, he and his followers surrendered

and were sent west of Mississippi. Yet, several hundred Seminoles managed to stay behind in the vast unchartered Everglades. The Government finally gave up pursuing the last free Seminole Indians and to this day they never formally surrendered, like the melting pot that became America. The Seminoles were a patchwork of different people and culture. They were Indians, African slaves and other refugees united in a struggle to create a separate nation. A proud and defiant people, the Seminoles remained today the only unconquered Indian nation in the United States.

The Navajo

In the mystical land of the great southwest, jagged pinnacle touches the clouds and giant sandstone buttes rise dramatically above the desert floor. It is here where Navajo nation carved its civilization many centuries ago. The Navajo's ancient ancestors came to this land from northwest Canada over 700 years ago and settled in the red rock canyon of what is now northern Arizona and New Mexico. They invaded the homeland of cliff-dwelling Anasazi (or the ancient ones who occupied the cliff dwellings scattered across the southwest) and drove them south towards Mexico. The Navajos created a unique culture based on raising crops, herding livestock, weaving and crafting jewelry.

While White settlers avoided this dry and rugged landscape, the Navajos held this in special reverence. The land became a source of sustenance and spiritual nourishments. They learned to grow patches of corns in the desert soil and planted peach orchards in the canyon's bottom land. When sky provided the rain, mother earth provided food, grain and pastures. The most common symbol of Navajo and the spiritual link to the land was Hogan, a dome dwelling made of logs and earth. Hogans were used for both housing and ceremonial purposes. Their

entrances always faced east towards the rising sun. Almost every act of Navajo life from the building of Hogan to the planting of crops was ceremonial in nature accompanied by songs and prayers. Sand paintings were part of many Navajo healing ceremonies and had the power to restore order to the world. These paintings were made by medicine men who sprinkled coloured sands on the floor of the ceremonial Hogan. Their designs told stories of Navajo creation myth when the first holy people were miraculously produced from corn, rain, pollen and precious stone by the Gods and the wind.

In the 1600, Spanish people introduced sheep and horses to the Navajos and they became Southwest's most renowned herdsmen and riders. Women played a vital life in the tribal life too. Nearly every Navajo woman was skilled at hand weaving using sheep's wool on pueblo loom. Their decorative rugs and blankets with patterned designs and symbolic pictures became known the world over. At the end of the Mexican-American war in the 1848, the English-speaking Whites moved into Navajo lands. The Navajos had been fighting Spanish-speaking intruders for 250 years. The Navajos stole sheep and the horses from the Mexicans and they in turn, captured Indians for slave. The Navajos figured their enemies would be expelled from the new US territory to Mexico. Instead, Washington gave the Mexicans the US citizenship they had denied the Navajos and allowed the slave trading to continue. The Indians could only watch in growing anger as soldiers built their first military post in 1851 and called it Fort Defiance.

The great Navajo chief Manuelito and his ally Barboncito were determined to sweep the Fort and its people from their land. In 1860, they attacked Fort Defiance with 1000 warriors. Though their arrows were no match for the musket fire, they

convinced Washington that Navajos will defend their homeland at all costs. General James Carleton, a ruthless army veteran soon took command of Fort Defiance. Of Navajo people, Carleton said, they were wolves who ran through the mountains and must be cleared away if the territory is to be opened for the settlers. So, Carleton chose a new place for the Navajos, a flat and desolate wasteland far away on the Pecos river called Bosque Redondo. Here, guarded by soldiers, Carleton planned Navajos to become self-sufficient farmers! But Barboncito refused by saying, 'I will not go to Bosque. I will not leave my country, not even if it means that I will be killed.'

Carleton chose his old friend Kit Carson to head the military campaign against the Navajos. In the summer of 1863, Kit Carson led a thousand New Mexico volunteers to wage war against the Navajos who numbered more than 12000. *Carson knew that the only way to conquer the Navajos was to scorch the very earth they lived upon and starve them into submission.* Carson's men destroyed most of the herds and the crops in six months' time. In January 1864, Carson led 300 soldiers leading to the Canyon de Chelly, the last Navajo stronghold. Soldiers burned Hogan, slaughtered livestock, destroyed corn fields, took women and children captives and killed the men with their muskets. Barboncito was captured but Manuelito escaped with 4000 members of his band. The 8000 Navajos who surrendered set out on a long walk, a terrible 300 miles journey to captivity at Bosque Redondo. Hungry, homesick and nearly naked against the cold, 200 Navajos died on their way to the wasteland that Carleton considered a fine reservation. Carleton's vision was that Navajos would turn inside out, changing from raiders and heathens into settled Christians. In the captivity, while the soldiers and others sought to turn the Navajos into Whites,

the Indians prayed only for release from the living hell. *The infamous 300 miles trek is still sacred to Navajo memory as 'The Long Walk.'*

The Indians who escaped the reservation told of a barren drought-stricken land they lived like prairie dogs and burros. Kit Carson continued to hunt for those who were still free. In September 1866, chief Manuelito and 23 hungry and ragged warriors surrendered at a military post in northwestern New Mexico. His band had resisted capture for more than three years, but now they were too exhausted to fight on. The days of the free Navajo nation were over.

By 1868, horrific reports of life at Bosque Redondo created a public outcry. The land was desolate, water was unfit for drinking and government ration was almost non-existent. 2000 Navajo people died at Bosque due to starvation and disease. The sooner it is abandoned, and the Indians removed, the better, said the reservation superintendent. And so, on 1 June, Manuelito, Barboncito and five others met with the army General William Sherman to sign a treaty for return to their reservation in their old homeland. The Navajos would never forget those four years of deaths and sufferings at Bosque Redondo, the 'fearing time' it was called. Over the years, the Navajo people fought countless battles to defend their territory and endured endless years of forced captivity, but they never lost their spiritual link to the land. It is in this land and in the giant mountains that surround it and the sky above, the very soul of Navajo can be found.

The Cheyenne

It was the Cheyenne and Teton Lakota who fought the hardest for their lands and lives. These two nations would be the last to ride into freedom across the great Plains. Here the vast prairies stretched from Texas

to Canada and from the Mississippi river to the Rocky Mountains. As the mightiest of Plain's tribes in the 19th century, the Cheyenne and Teton Lakota shared a similar way of life. They were horse warriors who built tippy villages and they had many of the same ceremonies and the rites, and to each of them American bison was life, the gift from the great spirit. By 1850, millions of buffaloes moved like a dark living sea across the land. This was truly a buffaloes' kingdom and the Indians who followed the herds cast only a small shadow under the sky. For the Teton Lakota and the Cheyenne, the bison was endowed with supernatural power and they took from their herd all they needed for their existence. They killed only enough animals to supply their needs for the winter.

The Cheyenne thought of themselves as the beautiful people. For centuries they lived as farmers and potters in the great pine forests above the source of the Mississippi. But the Lakota drove them into high Plains in the 1700s. In time, they abandoned planting and followed the roaming buffaloes. The Cheyenne were fiercely independent and were among the feared warriors in the west. They were known for their advanced religious beliefs. They held a life-renewing Sun Dance ceremony every mid-summer after a tribe left the winter camp and gathered for the buffalo hunt. Their most important religious rituals included thanksgiving to the mysterious power, and the rebirth of life on earth and for the return of seasons of growth. But by the end of the civil war, the century-old life of the Cheyenne people was threatened. Covered wagons streamed across the prairies and the Whites began to slaughter the buffaloes for their hides and sometimes just for pleasure. Soon hundreds of buffalo bones would lay scattered on the southern plains with their uneaten flesh rotting in the hot prairie sun.

After the territory of Colorado was created in 1861, the Whites wanted to open

the entire land for settlement and force the Cheyenne into submission. Colorado Governor John Evans declared war to depress the Indians into the reservation. The district military commander, John Chivington, ordered his men to burn villages and kill Cheyenne wherever and whenever found. This preacher-turned soldier said, '*It is right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians.*' But the Cheyenne peace chief, Black Kettle said, 'It is not my intention or wish to fight the Whites. I want to be friendly and peaceable and keep my bands. I want to live in peace.' Black Kettle had once shaken hands of President Lincoln in Washington and he prided himself that he never led a raid against the settlers.

In the fall of 1864, Black Kettle and a fellow chief met Governor Evans and Commander Chivington. They convinced the Cheyenne to move to Fort Lyon where Cheyenne could stay the winter in military protection. So Black Kettle led 600 of his people to a camp in the broad valley of Sand Creek in Colorado. But then, in the gray dawn of November 1864, Chivington led his 3rd Cavalry on a senseless raid and murder and mutilation, known as Sand Creek Massacre. Most of Black Kettle's warriors were out hunting when 700 soldiers attacked the sleeping village. Black Kettle raised an American flag and white banner over his tippy, but the troops shot everyone they found. Screaming Indians fled in all directions. A handful of warriors fought back, and the skirmishing continued for four hours on the Creek. Then at noon silence fell. 200 Cheyenne and the Navajos were dead. Two-third of them were women and children. Nine chiefs had perished. Though Black Kettle escaped unharmed, his wife was shot nine times and was left to die. 'Chivington Boys,' as he called them paraded through Denver showing off scalps, severed arms and legs of the Indians. But

rumours of the atrocities spread, terrible enough to outrage the American public. Kit Carson, himself a battler of Indians, called this action of a coward or dog.

Over the next three years, the Indians ravaged the valley in revenge. They ripped down telegraph wires, and pillaged stage coach station and rampaged military outposts and towns. Scores of settlers were killed. Their women and children were dragged away as captives. Now public opinions turned back against the Indians and the United States launched a full-scale Indian war. Black Kettle still hoped to spare his people and he led 80 families to a refuge south of the Arkansas river. By 1868, the Kansas military commander Philip Sheridan was convinced that the Cheyenne had to be punished. Sheridan ordered the brash and flamboyant Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer to proceed toward the Washita river, the supposedly winter seat of the hostile tribes, to destroy the villages and ponies, to kill or hang all warriors and bring back all women and children.

Four years after the Sand Creek massacre, Custer's elite 7th cavalry attacked the sleeping Cheyenne village south of the Arkansas river where Black Kettle and his people were camped. In a matter of minutes 103 Cheyenne laid dead including the great Black Kettle and his wife. The remaining Cheyenne were herded into a reservation in the western Indian territory where their past life in peace and buffalo hunt was *replaced by food ration and conversion to Christianity*. But the land would perhaps always know the people who walked its past prairies and who hunted its sea of thundering bisons. The Cheyenne were first to practise the concept of peaceful resistance. Their advanced religious beliefs and spiritual devotion served them well in their struggle to remain free. Among the native Americans even today, the Cheyenne would always be known as the beautiful people of the Plains.

The Lakota

One of the famous north American Indians were the mighty Teton Lakota. They dominated the heart of the Great Plains of what is now Minnesota to Montana, from the upper Missouri River to the Black River. They fiercely resisted the White Mans' rule for fifty years holding back the tides of Western expansion until they could fight no more. The Lakota had originally come from the southeastern Woodland migrating along the Atlantic coast and then passing over the Great Lakes. They farmed and hunted in the upper Mississippi river area of Minnesota until finally settling in the Great Plains in the early 1700s. The Lakota built a lifestyle around two animals—the buffalo and the horse. They depended on the buffaloes for the food, clothing and the lodging. They believed they were endowed with supernatural power, a gift from the wise one above.

By 1860, Lakota had lost most of their lands through treaties. All that remained in their possession was sacred Black Hills and some hunting ground in Montana. The Black Hills became the sacred ground of the Lakota nation. Warriors travelled to Black Hills, sought vision, communed with the great spirit and received their spiritual power of war medicine. Yet, in 1866, the Whites came to them again. This time for a permission to make a great road (the Bozeman Trail) between the North Platte River and the newly discovered gold fields of Montana. The great Lakota chief Red Cloud hated the idea of building roads through Lakota hunting ground. The request for permission was only a sham. The soldiers were already on their way to secure the road. The Red Cloud was determined to fight back and for the next two years the Lakota held the troops under virtual siege. No wagon train, civilian or military was safe on the Bozeman trail and Lakota raid claimed 154 lives. This was Red Cloud's principal military achievement.

In the spring of 1868, General William Sherman came to Fort Laramie to make a peace treaty with Red Cloud. But the tribe leader sent a message saying, 'When we see the soldiers moving away and the Forts abandoned, then I will come down and talk.' Reluctantly, the War Department complied. The Bozeman Trail Forts were abandoned. Red Cloud rode triumphantly to Fort Laramie and signed the treaty declaring the Powder river country and the Black Hills as un-ceded Indian territory. The Fort Laramie treaty guaranteed Whites' withdrawal from the Bozeman Trail Forts. In return, Red Cloud promised to go on to the reservation where he would never lift his hands against the Whites again.

For eight years Lakota would try to forget the Whites. But in the summer of 1874, Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer led 1200 men on a gold-hunting expedition into the Black Hills. The Indians watched the torrent of rioters pour into the sacred heart of their nation in complete disregard of the treaties the Whites had made.

When Washington tried to buy the Black Hills, the tribal war chief Crazy Horse replied, 'One does not sell the earth upon which his people walk. If the Whites try to take them, I will fight.' Unable to buy the Black Hills, President Grant sent orders to the Lakota to report to a Dakota agency by 31 January 1876 or be declared hostile and subject to military action. The invincible Colonel George A. Custer drove his exhausted 7th Cavalry through the rolling hills of Montana in a relentless search for the Indians. Finally, on the morning of 25 June 1876, Custer found his prey, camped in a valley of stream. He charged his soldiers straight into the Indian encampment. A thousand warriors led by Crazy Horse met Custer's troops, and now on a ridge called Custer Hills, Custer's forces were swallowed up by the Indians.

After the war, the Indians soon broke into small bands but were relentlessly pursued by the army. Crazy Horses' Oglala tribe kept up their attacks and Sitting Bull, a medicine chief of Hunkpapa tribe led his men to escape to Canada. That fall the Lakota were forced to sign a waiver to their right to the Powder river and Black Hills. The government said they had violated the treaty by going to war with the US. They promised a reservation for them in the Powder river country. In May of 1877, Crazy Horse marched his band of starving Oglala tribes to Fort Robinson. *They came singing peace songs and Crazy Horse threw down three rifles giving away the war path forever. But as Crazy Horse was brought into Fort Robinson, a soldier bayoneted him in the back.* The name Crazy Horse stirs the imagination to know who he was. He was a quiet, humble, caring and thinking human being. He is most often remembered as a warrior and a leader of warriors. He was born in Black Hills, which is now South Dakota.

To the north, a commission came to lure Sitting Bull back from Canada, offering to pardon his war crime in return for surrender. The Hunkpapa leader refused asking, 'What have we done that you want us to stop? It is all the people on your side who started us to making troubles. If we must die, we die defending our rights.' Canada refused them a reservation and Sitting Bull's people were homesick. Weary of cold and hunger, Sitting Bull and his followers crossed the border in July of 1881. Over the next ten years the last of the Lakota were brought on to the reservation and in all of the vastness of the great Plains, not a herd of buffalo could be found.

On the reservation, the warriors lived on rotting scraps and dreams of their past. In fact, the rations had been cut precipitously and people were nearly starving. Against that backdrop of despair, a prophet came telling them of a new messiah coming to

bury the Whites beneath the earth and bring the Indian dead to life. The hunting ground will be restored, and the land will once again be heavy with buffaloes. This prophet was a Nevada Paiute medicine man named Wovoka. He introduced the Ghost Dance movement, which spread throughout the Basin and the Plains, and farther like a prairie wind. The Wovoka's warriors daunted ghost shirts that would supposedly stop White man's bullets.

The Ghost Dance frightened many Whites. Fearing a new Indian uprising, US Government sent over half the US Army to the Indian reservation. Though Sitting Bull was openly sceptical about this new religion, the Whites thought he was to blame for the disturbances and ordered his arrest. On the morning of 15 December forty-three Indian police led the Hunkpapa chief from his cabin. Shots were fired and Sitting Bull fell to the ground dead. Another band of soldiers had gone on searches for Miniconjou chief Big Foot. The Army caught up with him and the Indians and the soldiers camped for the night beside the Wounded Knee creek. 500 soldiers stood guard over 300 Indian men, women and children. At sunrise the army began to disarm the Indians. Somehow a rifle went off and a soldier fell dead and both sides opened fire at once. The army cut down half the men with volley and rapid fire from the hill. Indians ran and were shot down like buffaloes. When the smoke blew

away, scores of men, women and children of the Lakota nation laid dead, their blood flowing together with few corpses from the 7th Cavalry. The Ghost Shirts have been powerless, and the snow fell for two days softly muffling the moans from dying.

On New Years day of 1891, the frozen dead of Wounded Knee were gathered in wagons and were buried in a mass grave. A Lakota Sioux and Black Hawk leader said many years later, 'I can still see the butchered women and children lying in heaps and scattered. I can see something else—dying in the bloody mud and buried in the blizzard, a people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.'

The legacy of Teton Lakota still commands the respect and admiration today. Their fight for survival against the US army at Big Horn created the legend and ultimately led to their final defeat. The spirit of the Lakota, a proud people who poured their blood to preserve a way of life will endure long after the stories of battles are forgotten. These Nations each contributed a piece of patchwork quilt that has become America. From the Iroquois great laws of peace, which influenced the writing of our great constitution, to the Cheyenne concept of peaceful resistance—the basket contained everyting. These great Indian nations built a heritage that still inspires new generation of Native Americans. They will always be a vital part of American adventure. ■

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* An engineer by profession, in his own right, Benoy R. Samanta is also a contemplative writer who champions universal values.