

## ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PICTURE": SOCIAL HISTORY, POPULAR CULTURE, AND THE IDEA OF THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE

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Competing schools of thought regarding American imperialism, American constructions of race, Native American experiences, and white settlers' place within the American West can be seen in non-fiction and fictional accounts of the 1864 Sand Creek massacre in what is now eastern Colorado. Due to a range of factors including the emergence of social history methodology and Cold War politics, a shift in both American historiography and fictional representations of Native Americans and the West can be observed in certain scholarly works and Western films and novels during the period 1945-1970. Debates over the meaning of Sand Creek, often inspired by film representations, also reveal Coloradans' and Americans' attempts to reckon with shameful and embarrassing events of the past by contesting notions of race and imperialism presented by Western fiction.

“The other side of the picture”:

Social History, Popular Culture, and the Idea of the Sand Creek Massacre

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

2015

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## **Acknowledgements**

I could not have completed this work without the generous assistance and support of a number of people. The incomparable research librarians at the Denver Public Library Central Branch's Western History and Genealogy Department and at the History Colorado Center's Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center facilitated my use of their wonderful and unique archival collections on the Sand Creek massacre. The librarians of the University of Maryland's McKeldin and Hornbake Libraries, as well as that of the Library of Congress, were also invaluable.

The UMD History Thesis Support Group provided the indispensable input of fellow Master's thesis writers at every stage of this work's development. My advisor Dr. Richard Bell's support and enthusiasm helped keep this project moving for the past year, and his high standards and critical eye have improved my writing of history beyond measure. My other two committee members, Dr. Saverio Giovacchini and Dr. Colleen Woods, endowed this work with greater breadth and depth of scope through their particular insights.

Finally, this work would be impossible without the love, support, encouragement, and patience of my wife Lauren. Without her unhesitating willingness to move from our home and family in Colorado all the way to Maryland, and then to work long hours to pay the bills while I pursue my passion for American history, I could not have written this. I dedicate this work to her.

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## Introduction

On December 3, 2014, Governor John Hickenlooper of Colorado stood on the steps of the state capitol in Denver, surrounded by members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho nations, to apologize.

We should not be afraid to criticize and condemn that which is inexcusable, so I am here to offer something that has been a long time coming. On behalf of the State of Colorado, I want to apologize to the runners, to the tribal leaders and to all the indigenous people - and the proud and painful legacy - you represent. On behalf of the good, peaceful, loving people of Colorado, I want to say we are sorry for the atrocity that our government and its agents visited upon your ancestors. Today, as these runners complete their 16th Annual Sand Creek Spiritual Run, I want to assure you that we will not run from this history, and that we will always work for peace and healing.<sup>1</sup>

It was an official acknowledgement and apology on behalf of the state for one of the most notorious events from Colorado's past – the 1864 Sand Creek massacre – the interpretation and meaning of which have been contested by Denverites almost since the day it occurred.

Hickenlooper's insistence that Denver should not "run from [Sand Creek] history" illustrates how the very existence of the city was deeply connected to the events surrounding the massacre. Denver's early residents arrived there via overland trails that crossed land reserved for Cheyenne and Arapaho people by treaties including the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie. Another treaty had allowed white settlement, but not all Plains Indians assented to its terms. Seeking to prevent permanent white settlement on Indian land, some native groups attacked overland travelers in the spring and summer of 1864. Outraged settlers then publicly displayed the remains of whites killed by Indians,

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<sup>1</sup> John Hickenlooper, text of December 4, 2014 speech, colorado.gov, retrieved March 12, 2015.

parading them through Denver's streets. One of these macabre displays helped inspire a volunteer militia to march to the Cheyenne and Arapaho camp at Sand Creek where they attacked and killed at least 150 non-combatant Indians, mostly women and children. Subsequent newspaper editorials and public demonstrations offered praise for these militiamen. They had, according to one December 1864 newspaper article, "collectively 'cleaned out' the confederated savages on Sand Creek, [and had] won for themselves and their commanders, from Colonel down to corporal, the eternal gratitude of dwellers on these plains."<sup>2</sup> These accounts lauded the militia's politically ambitious commander, Colonel John Chivington of the Colorado militia, even as accounts critical of his actions made their way to Washington.

The public nature of a speech by a sitting state governor turned Hickenlooper's 2014 brief remarks into an act of commemoration. Indeed, public events have long driven the conversation about Sand Creek. Yet, while Hickenlooper's speech turned on themes of atonement and reconciliation, many prior public acts indicated that the violence of Sand Creek warranted no such atonement. Militia Captain Silas Soule, who had refused the order to attack the camp and became one of the first outspoken critics of the government-sanctioned violence at Sand Creek, had been murdered in the street in April 1865 a short walk from the steps where Hickenlooper delivered his speech. Public demonstrations—ranging from speeches and newspaper editorials to demonstrations and even murder on a public street—have animated Denver and Colorado history from the period prior to statehood to the present.

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<sup>2</sup> "THE INDIAN NEWS," *Daily Rocky Mountain News*, December 8, 1864, 2.

This thesis argues that the 1864 Sand Creek massacre had local and regional but also national significance. It reverberated beyond Denver and the state of Colorado as Americans attempted to define appropriate and just uses of violence first as they “civilized” the West, and later as some of their cultural descendants adopted a similar language of civilization in twentieth century imperial projects. I argue that these attempts and the broader cultural attitudes that informed them are evident in film depictions of the American West. Indeed, I have identified a major shift in those attitudes as observed in motion pictures produced between the Second World War and the Vietnam War, roughly 1945 to 1970. While previous historians have attended to non-cinematic public responses to the massacre, this thesis demonstrates that filmmakers and audiences grappled not only with how Sand Creek should be represented in film, but also with the question as to what Sand Creek’s legacy meant in local, national, and transnational terms.

\* \* \*

Non-fiction writers have grappled with the Sand Creek massacre almost since the day Chivington and his men returned to Denver from Colorado’s eastern plains. The earliest writers often had personal or economic connections to Chivington and his supporters, and so these early non-fiction accounts often stressed the dire threat that Denver and its (white) citizens faced from a bloodthirsty and stubborn Indian menace. They also drew attention to Chivington’s personal characteristics, such as his large physical stature, his unquestioned talent for public speaking, and his personal charisma. These characteristics helped paint Chivington as the broad-shouldered defender of the vulnerable city and its citizens, but also diverted readers from the wanton brutality that Silas Soule and others had witnessed. Chivington’s supporters argued that his critics,

including military and government officials who had summoned Chivington to account for his actions, were soft-willed easterners who had no idea what westerners were really dealing with. Something had needed to be done about Indian raids, writers like Junius Wharton, Irving Howbert, and Reginald Craig argued, and Chivington had been just the man to do it.

Advocates for the Indian perspective, such as Helen Hunt Jackson, soon challenged those early accounts. These writers, who had no discernible personal connection to Chivington or the military, argued that Chivington and his men were bloodthirsty thugs whose mild censure had been an inadequate punishment for their crimes. By 1881, when Jackson published *A Century of Dishonor*, two schools of thought had emerged. One depicted Chivington as a gallant liberator. The other depicted him as a racist, bloodthirsty monster. Later, in the first half of the twentieth century, the depiction of Chivington as white liberator would be challenged in a new way by the naturalist, anthropologist, and historian George Bird Grinnell. Grinnell would inject a much-needed scholarly approach, actively seeking out first-person Native American testimony through correspondence and interviews. As the historian Ari Kelman has ably shown, Grinnell found several willing witnesses. Cheyenne survivor George Bent, for instance, worked tirelessly in the last years of his life to present the Native American perspective on Sand Creek to as broad an audience as possible.<sup>3</sup> As historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen found in a late-twentieth-century study, Native Americans have often used history and memory of the past to generate cultural definitions and strengthen community ties, but also to point to a “collective past” and “connect their narratives much more explicitly

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<sup>3</sup> Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 33-43.

to the American national story than most white Americans do, even while they dissent sharply from its traditional formulations.”<sup>4</sup> Fluent in both Cheyenne and white culture, George Bent acted as a cultural mediator to ensure that knowledge of Cheyenne experiences would be preserved in ways both Cheyennes and whites could understand.

Of course, Grinnell and Bent’s view of the massacre did not satisfy everyone. Reacting to increasingly critical interpretations of nineteenth century cavalry actions in the West, particularly Sand Creek, Reginald Craig published *The Fighting Parson* in 1959. With *The Fighting Parson*, Craig crafted a biography of John Chivington so glowing that it bordered on hagiography. As a result, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the debate raged on.<sup>5</sup>

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The advent of cinema in the early twentieth century provided another platform for this discussion. The general outlines of Native Americans’ portrayals in American motion pictures can be easily sketched. Prior to the 1940s, sympathetic depictions of Native Americans in film were rare. Filmmakers often depicted Indians as either whooping hordes of rapid-fire targets for the cavalry and the cowboy, or as monstrous, brutal savages. These films continued the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary depictions of frontier heroes and villains. The heroes of these stories were masculine, law-abiding protectors of white order and virtue, especially female virtue. Indians in

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<sup>4</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 149.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Hunt Jackson’s *A Century of Dishonor* was originally published in 1881, and republished in 1965. J.P. Dunn, Jr.’s *Massacres of the Mountains* was originally published in 1886, and republished in 1969. William Clarke Whitford’s *Colorado Volunteers in the Civil War* was originally published in 1906, and republished in 1963. Eugene F. Ware’s *The Indian War of 1864* was originally published in 1911, and republished in 1960. George Bird Grinnell’s *The Fighting Cheyennes* was originally published in 1915, republished first in 1956 and again several times thereafter during the 1950s and 1960s. LeRoy R. Hafen’s *Colorado* was first published in 1933, and republished in 1970.

these works could serve either as hero or villain, violent or helpful toward whites. These Indians were masters of nature and physically imposing as hero or villain. “[The] Western,” as the historian Robert Berkhofer, Jr. observed, “perpetuated the traditional White images of the Indian.”<sup>6</sup> Fictional Indians worked well as symbols, but real-life Native Americans – who, despite these fictions’ implications to the contrary, had not vanished – were often marginalized in fictional representations.

Following World War II, Americans of a far wider variety of backgrounds gained access to education through the G.I. Bill, and previously marginalized people advocated for historical scholarship that included their stories and perspectives. As a result, historians as well as filmmakers aimed to examine the lives of ordinary people in more detail, and Hollywood slowly began to produce mainstream films that took steps toward depicting Native Americans as rounded human beings. Native peoples, it transpired, had film-worthy stories, too. Telling those stories, however, often reproduced existing constructions of Native Americans as inherently violent, or as “pacified” and defeated. Knowledge about Indians was informed by these fictional representations. “At stake in discursive/ideological formations throughout U.S. history,” as Philip Deloria argues, “has been the body of accepted knowledge about Indian people, the ways in which knowledge helped constitute individuals and groups as subjects, and the new and old ways in which power was to be applied to Indians and non-Indians alike.”<sup>7</sup> Additionally, these narratives often required the presence of a white savior (such as James Stewart in *Broken Arrow*

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<sup>6</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 10-11.

(1950)), both to guide the on-screen Indians past threats generated by the white presence on their land, and to serve as the audience's surrogate.<sup>8</sup>

Native Americans' representation in film was evidently in transition. During the 1960s, the Motion Picture Production Code's previously powerful censorship of the American film industry weakened and finally collapsed, allowing directors to include a far wider range of violent and sexual content.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, activist movements of the 1960s provoked new discussions on race and class. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Indian rights movement had begun to draw attention to injustices committed in the name of the United States government. In addition, media coverage of the occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay between November 20, 1969 and June 11, 1971 by the Native American rights group Indians of All Tribes drew international attention to the government's continued disregard for native peoples and the treaties the government had signed with them.

As a result, filmmakers began to place Native Americans at the center of their stories, albeit usually with white actors made up to look "Indian" playing the lead roles. The United States' involvement in the increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam shaped content as well, as films of the time began to confront the issues of state-sponsored brutality toward indigenous peoples who resisted the United States' imperial adventures. In November 1969, Americans learned the details of the My Lai massacre, in which U.S.

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<sup>8</sup> Not that the white savior trope is the sole domain of any ideological category or scholarly approach. As Matthew Hughey has shown in *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), the metaphor has been engaged by writers and filmmakers on the right and the left to accomplish a variety of artistic and rhetorical tasks. "Over time," Hughey argues, "the white savior metaphor has stabilized and reduced the complexity of an array of interracial and intercultural interactions into a digestible narrative of redemption, individuality, and sacrifice." (12)

<sup>9</sup> The Motion Picture Production Code was popularly referred to as the Hays Code, after long-serving and influential Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America President Will H. Hays.

Army forces in South Vietnam killed hundreds of unarmed civilians. It was in this context that the film *Soldier Blue* was released in August 1970. Probably the most commercially-successful film to depict the Sand Creek massacre, it shocked audiences with its graphic violence and gore, if not for its attempts at historicism. In *Soldier Blue*, director Ralph Nelson harnessed Americans' growing frustration with the Vietnam War, their shock at the horror of My Lai, their new willingness to examine the events of the past from new perspectives, and their willingness to tolerate previously unthinkable content in a mainstream film. Marketed with the tagline "The Most Savage Film in History!" the advertising campaign for *Soldier Blue* provocatively appropriated the word – "savage" – that had defined the one-dimensional portrayal of Natives in the Western films of previous generations.

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In the immediate aftermath of the Sand Creek massacre, some white westerners had sought to renew themselves. Occupying land previously ceded to Native Americans but later booming with white settlers eager to capitalize on nearby discoveries of rich mineral resources, many white settlers applauded the efforts of men like Chivington to try to subdue what they saw as a monolithic existential threat. In the twentieth century, Americans used film and novels to mythologize this frontier and those frontiersmen, their relationship to their shared past, and their predecessors' relationship to Native Americans. This mythology aligned with the renewal described by Richard Slotkin as "regeneration through violence."<sup>10</sup> This thesis argues that the massacre – both Sand Creek specifically and The Massacre as a generally-applied narrative trope – took on

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 5, 14-24.

additional layers of meaning as Americans struggled to define goodness and right action during the early years of the Cold War. Many films of this period suggested that not all state power was righteous, nor was all state-sanctioned violence. Massacres were shameful, and they warranted official public atonement.

This thesis is a study of how such evolving understandings were contested at both the local and national levels. It is in part a local history because it examines a part of local lore whose meaning has been contested among local people in order to define their place in the world. Debates that took place in the pages of Denver newspapers between 1945 and 1970 showed that many twentieth-century Coloradans still found the idea of Sand Creek compelling. The story resonated with the people there. For that reason, some Coloradans saw criticism of John Chivington as criticism of their own presence in the territory they called home. Others contended that deliberately glossing over unpleasant events from the past did no service to Colorado or to Coloradans' place within it. It was better, these Coloradans argued, to confront Sand Creek and seek better representation of Native Americans in popular culture and in public memory.

As a study of history and memory, this thesis also contends that the way Americans more broadly have remembered Sand Creek can shed light on how communities preserve memory to define and tell stories about themselves. This is particularly true when those stories resurrect painful and embarrassing events, and when the stories and the way they are told exclude people intimately involved with the historical events upon which those stories are based. This thesis also examines what historian Emily Rosenberg has identified as the “intertextual relationships among diverse kinds of cultural material” wherein memory and history can be analyzed “not as

oppositional but as interactive forms.”<sup>11</sup> The interrelationships between history, memory, and popular media are plainly evident in the non-fictional and fictional retellings of Sand Creek, as well as in Coloradans’ and Americans’ debates over those retellings’ contents. As this study will show, novelists and filmmakers during the first few decades of the Cold War used the specter of Sand Creek to critique white racism, the mentality of the lynch mob, McCarthyism, American imperialism, and the continued mistreatment of Native Americans by the federal government.

In addition, Sand Creek offers a rare opportunity to perform a transnational analysis. The nineteenth-century American West was, after all, a space of near-constant transnational encounter due to the long term, wide-ranging colonial project known as Manifest Destiny. Simply drawing lines on a map and declaring sovereign authority over an area did not and does not establish nationhood in an area, particularly when other nations already live in that territory and have for many generations. Establishing cultural and national hegemony for the United States in the West thus required colonization. White colonists encountered Indian nations as they moved to and through the Great Plains and Mountain West. Different Native American nations responded in a variety of ways to these encounters. No event from the period of early white settlement of the West illustrates those varied responses more clearly than Sand Creek. Some native chiefs such as Black Kettle of the Cheyenne people worked for compromise and peace at almost any cost. Others, like the Dog Soldiers, chose active armed resistance to the colonization of their homelands. Though these nations were eventually subsumed into the nation known as the United States, and though they defined nationhood in ways often ignored or

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<sup>11</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 5.

unrecognized by white authorities at the time, their status as nations is not lessened, and multiple nations were indeed contesting their claims for territory and for existence in the West in 1864.

In these ways the story of Sand Creek presented cultural producers and consumers with an opportunity to engage simultaneously in debates regarding several important American mythologies, including but not limited to the myth of the frontier; the vanishing Indian/American; Manifest Destiny and the inevitability of conquest; white settlers and soldiers as civilizing agents; the American Indian as Brutal/Innocent/Noble Savage; the white savior film genre; the American West as a transnational space; and the idea of the nineteenth-century American West as a theater of genocide. During a period that saw a major shift in the way Americans remembered their shared history, those Americans re-evaluated what should be remembered and how it should be remembered. “Even at the moment that it is evolving,” as Maurice Halbwachs contended, “society returns to its past. It enframes the new elements that it pushes to the forefront in a totality of remembrances, traditions, and familiar ideas.”<sup>12</sup> The fictionalized representations of Sand Creek examined in this thesis demonstrate how the idea of Sand Creek remained with Coloradans and with Americans as the memory of the nineteenth century represented by dramatic film transformed between 1945 and 1970.

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<sup>12</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 86.

## **Chapter One: Tracing the Idea of Sand Creek in Non-Fiction, 1866-1970**

Examination of a series of non-fiction accounts of Sand Creek between the 1860s and 1960s reveals the development of competing schools of thought regarding the meaning of the event. Non-fiction accounts that were initially close to or connected in some way to Colonel John Chivington and his defenders repeatedly promoted the idea that Sand Creek was a necessary and just battle in which cruel, brutal Indian violence was met by honorable white retribution, breaking “Indian” resolve and ushering in peace for white settlers. By contrast, subsequent non-fiction syntheses that relied on a broader range of sources such as testimony from official hearings including that of Chivington’s critics, or that relied on Native-centered accounts, tended to assert that the event was a massacre wherein a politically ambitious and popular member of Colorado’s budding elite acted to crush Indian resistance in the area through wanton violence against non-combatants.

The latter school of thought has much in common with the present scholarly consensus that was first put forth by George Bird Grinnell in the early twentieth century, but by placing the blame for the massacre entirely on Chivington, its adherents often diluted the event’s greater context. Historians such as Stan Hoig, who published his monograph on Sand Creek in 1961, placed the event into the context of the Civil War and western conquest. These writers echoed reformer Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1881 assertion that the event was not an isolated incident, but part of a much larger pattern of white violence and deceit that was essential to the “settlement” of the West. But while Jackson wrote a call to action aimed at policymakers and that advocated fundamental reform of

nineteenth-century federal Indian policy, twentieth century scholars like Hoig wrote analyses of the events of Sand Creek based on the broadest possible selection of source documents, during a period in which the lives and activities of previously overlooked “ordinary people” received increased attention from historians.

My own analysis of these non-fiction accounts seeks to discern authors’ various points of view, and in doing so trace the development of these two competing schools of thought. In interrogating these sources, I first examine the language used by each author. Did the author describe Sand Creek as a “battle” or a “massacre?” Did the author use pronouns that assume common cause with the reader such as “we,” “us,” “they,” or “them?” I also examined whether the authors indicated that sides needed to be chosen in their framing of the controversy. Did an author acknowledge controversy but assert that it was for others to decide? Did an author use dehumanizing, patronizing, or paternalistic language such as “squaw,” “brave,” “buck,” or “papoose,” to describe Native Americans, or did the author make an effort to describe them as full human beings?

In this chapter I am also sensitive to the particular characters given prominence in these non-fiction narratives. I look for the key individuals and what the author said they did. The key figures I search for in every narrative are John Chivington, Black Kettle, Scott Anthony, Silas Soule, Left Hand, Jim Beckwourth, George Bent, and John Smith. I seek to demonstrate that specific descriptions of these men’s activities, their presence and occasional absence from the narratives, can tell us much about the author’s perspective. The authors’ claims as to the total body count at Sand Creek are critical as well. Chivington claimed to have killed more than 500 Indians, all “hostiles.” His contemporary critics set the total at somewhere between 70 and 150, with at least two

thirds being young armed men. The present scholarly consensus places the total much closer to the critics' estimates. Inflated estimates of the number of Cheyenne and Arapaho people killed can indicate deliberate reliance on Chivington's account of the event, or attempts to "stay out of the controversy" by reconciling the conflicting accounts by way of an arbitrary mathematical mean. This chapter also examines each author's general style. Was it analytical? Melodramatic? Condescending toward Native Americans? The choice of tone had the potential to be particularly influential in developing competing schools of thought about Sand Creek.

I have chosen the non-fiction works under scrutiny here specifically in order to trace the development of particular ideas that seem to have resonated with the general public. However, they are far from the only written accounts of Sand Creek. Indeed, written accounts can only tell part of the story of what Sand Creek means and has meant. The native peoples involved in this story kept oral historical records, no less official or authoritative than the written records kept by whites. Anthropologists like George Bird Grinnell and cultural mediators like George Bent worked to bring the Native perspective on Sand Creek to the general public. Nonetheless, the fact that white accounts were written down often lent them greater credence than Native accounts.

### **1866: A Local History for Local People**

In 1866, not quite eight years after the founding of the city of Denver and less than two years after Sand Creek, Junius E. Wharton published a city history. Printed by William Byers and John Dailey, who also published the *Rocky Mountain News*, the volume's odd-numbered pages contained the historical narrative. Advertisements for

local businesses and a city directory were printed on the even-numbered pages.

Wharton's account of the city's 1850s beginnings thus appeared opposite notices for Williams, Miller & Co. grocers and Mrs. A. R. Palmer's millinery patterns.

The language Wharton used to describe the massacre and its contentious aftermath shows how ideas about Sand Creek's meaning initially took shape. Wharton described the killing of the Hungate family, writing that they "were barbarously massacred by a strolling party of Cheyenne Indians."<sup>13</sup> Their mutilated bodies were then publicly displayed in Denver, which of course generated a climate of fear and paranoia. "While the public mind was wrought to the highest pitch by this evidence of Indian hostility so near their own doors," Wharton wrote, "[there] occurred the celebrated INDIAN 'SCARE."<sup>14</sup> An unfounded rumor of imminent Indian attacks on the city spread and caused a number of people to barricade themselves in banks and in the United States mint building. Wharton gently mocked these people, writing that "[by] the middle of the night, this terror wore off, and squads of armed men were sent scouting the surrounding country. These parties finding no trace of an enemy, the city soon resumed its usual business-like tranquility, and, as is usual in such cases, the most fearful boasted loudest of their individual prowess on the night of the great 'scare."<sup>15</sup> While the later braggadocio of the men who huddled within bank vaults during the post-Hungate false alarm prompted a bit of humor from Wharton, the lingering paranoid atmosphere in Denver was no joke. The threat was real, Wharton asserted, and roving bands of violent

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<sup>13</sup> Junius E. Wharton, *History of the City of Denver: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time* (Denver, Colorado: Byers & Dailey Printers, 1866), 145.

<sup>14</sup> Wharton, *History of the City of Denver*, 145.

<sup>15</sup> Wharton, *History of the City of Denver*, 149.

Indians really were out to get them. It was within this climate of existential fear, Wharton wrote, that the Colorado Third Volunteers organized under Colonel Chivington.

Wharton mistakenly understood the Cheyennes to be a centrally-controlled monolith, and clearly saw them as less than human. He described Indian violence as unprovoked and brutal, while white violence, in his view, was just and necessary retribution. Wharton's language reveals how important it was for westerners to shape and direct the idea of Sand Creek for succeeding generations, and for Denverites to shape and direct how Chivington's men were remembered:

The exploits of this fine body of men [the Colorado Third Volunteers], and the gallantry of their officers, will find a fair page and a clean record, in the history of Colorado. It is sufficient to state, that the regiment has been shamefully abused, for doing the very thing required at their hands—crippling the power of the most numerous and hostile tribe of the plains which Colorado had to fear, and who, without doubt, had their outrages been let go unpunished, would soon have become bold and strong enough, by being re-inforced with other hostile bands, to have massacred the citizens [sic] and burned the city of Denver.<sup>16</sup>

Chivington's actions were necessary, Wharton argued. Far from being the coordination of a massacre, his actions actually prevented massacres of white Coloradans. The volunteers were "fine" men, their officers were "gallant," and Indians were "numerous and hostile." Wharton's descriptions of the attack itself are also revealing:

Early in the morning of a subsequent day, the gallant regiment surprised the treacherous and cowardly foe in their village or camp, and an attack was immediately ordered. The Indians fought stubbornly from the outset, but their resistance was vain against men who had suffered so many

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<sup>16</sup> Wharton, *History of the City of Denver*, 155.

deprivations on account of savage violence, and, who too well knew the treachery and cold blooded cruelty of their merciless foes.<sup>17</sup>

Again Wharton used language that divided everyone at Sand Creek into two camps: “gallant” defenders of the pioneers who bravely confronted “treacherous,” “cowardly,” and “cruel” savages. Wharton’s account evidently relied heavily on Chivington’s later testimony and writings. Wharton asserted that white scalps were found in the camp, justifying the soldiers’ violence. He did not mention mutilations of Native bodies by white soldiers, or the body parts that were subsequently displayed by the men upon their return to Denver. He also unquestioningly used Chivington’s inflated body count estimate of 300-500 Indians.

Wharton’s account illustrated how, almost from the day it occurred, the Sand Creek massacre generated controversy that divided Coloradans and spread all the way to Washington. Conflicting reports about Sand Creek prompted a series of military and Congressional hearings on this situation in the far-off West, while the military and Congress were immersed in some of the most destructive and dire days of the Civil War. In summarizing his account of Sand Creek, Wharton addressed this controversy:

This battle subsequently became a theme of great discord and ill-feeling, one party claiming that the Indians were friendly and under the protection of the general government, notwithstanding the evidences found of either their hostility or that of some other band with whom they held too intimate a relation. The other party stoutly maintaining that those who made cause with the Indians, were actuated by a desire to trade with them, as great fortunes were made thereby, and that no matter what hostilities the Indians might commit, they deplored retaliation as it stopped their commerce. It is not for this writer to say in this work, which party is in the right.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Wharton, *History of the City of Denver*, 159.

<sup>18</sup> Wharton, *History of the City of Denver*, 159-161.

After describing the Sand Creek massacre as a righteous intervention by the forces of good against savagery, Wharton asserted that he was disinterested and non-partisan. He claimed simply to report the facts; it was up to the reader to decide their meaning. Wharton's volume is the earliest source I have found wherein the author made this claim. He would not be the last.

The names of many prominent figures present at Sand Creek do not appear in Wharton's narrative. Black Kettle, White Antelope, Left Hand, Scott Anthony, and Silas Soule are absent. Wharton described Chivington's May 1859 arrival in Denver as a Methodist minister. He noted that this was the same J.M. Chivington who later led white forces in a "victory" over the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, "for which," Wharton said, "he incurred the censure of the authorities, and became one of the most abused men in the west."<sup>19</sup> The only other places where Chivington's name appears in Wharton's volume are in his listings as a "Freighter" in the city directory and as a member of the executive committee of the Colorado Seminary – along with J.G. Vawter, former Governor John Evans, and *Rocky Mountain News* publisher William Byers.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear what direct relationship Wharton and Chivington may have had, but the architect of Sand Creek certainly knew Wharton's publisher, a man who would subsequently serve as one of Chivington's chief defenders. The Chivington-as-protector trope, then, originated under conditions in which the author of an early, formative account had some connection to Chivington or his associates, and who was willing to embrace the language of heroic quest to describe Chivington and the language of the brute savage to describe his targets.

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<sup>19</sup> Wharton, *History of the City of Denver*, 77-79.

<sup>20</sup> Wharton, *History of the City of Denver*, 120, 138.

### **1881: A Reformer's Call to Action**

Author Helen Hunt Jackson opened her 1881 rallying cry *A Century of Dishonor* by directly confronting the controversy over Native Americans' place in America and various white authorities' disingenuous dealings with them. Hunt clearly viewed interactions between the United States government and the various Native American groups as interactions between nations. She applied interpretations of international law to these interactions, citing Hugo Grotius, Emer de Vattel, and Henry Wheaton, among other leading international law theorists. Jackson argued that the federal government had placed Native Americans in a special, newly-invented category in order to sidestep international legal precedent. If international legal precedent did not apply to the interactions between the government and Native Americans, then pursuing conquest via bad-faith treaties and other underhanded means would not be out of the question.

Jackson's analysis reflected the limited understanding of Native American cultural and political organization found even among many of their leading white advocates at the time. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Plains peoples operated in semi-autonomous bands. While they retained particular cultural identities – Cheyenne, Arapaho, Lakota, Pawnee, etc. – and often shared respect for the wisdom of particular chiefs like Black Kettle, they were not centrally-controlled hegemons. In describing the growing tensions between and among natives and white settlers in Colorado in the months leading up to Sand Creek, Jackson implied that the Cheyennes and the Arapahoes were monoliths controlled by leading chiefs or councils. This projection of the structure

of official white authority onto the Plains peoples led to a fundamental misunderstanding of those peoples' actions:

[Many] of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes took to a system of pilfering reprisals from emigrant trains, and in the fights resulting from this effort to steal they committed many terrible murders. All the tribes on the plains were more or less engaged in these outrages; and it was evident, before midsummer of 1864, that the Government must interfere with a strong hand to protect the emigrants and Western settlers—to protect them from the consequences of its own bad faith with the Indians.<sup>21</sup>

Jackson described how “friendly Arapahoes and Cheyennes” met with military authorities at Camp Weld outside Denver in September 1864, showing that some Indians were “peaceable and loyal.”<sup>22</sup> Jackson then described Sand Creek as “one of the foulest massacres which the world has seen. This camp of friendly Indians was surprised at daybreak, and the men, women, and children were butchered in cold blood.”<sup>23</sup> This language established Sand Creek as a pivotal location for Jackson’s central argument: that Native Americans were deliberately mistreated by officials of the United States who acted in bad faith, in no small part because they did not consider Indians to be fully human. The West needed civilizing, and the savage, constructed as civilization’s definitive opponent, had to be removed. Jackson argued that this notion invited not peace and safety, but an endless cycle of violent revenge.

Jackson actually named the people involved in the Sand Creek massacre, criticized Chivington and his troops, and even quoted Indian leaders in her account:

Elsewhere, Black Kettle spoke of Colonel Chivington’s troops as ‘that fool band of soldiers that cleared out our lodges, and killed our women and children. This is hard on us.’ With a magnanimity and common-sense

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<sup>21</sup> Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881), 86-87.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, 87.

which white men would have done well to imitate in their judgments of the Indians, he recognized that it would be absurd, as well as unjust, to hold all white men in distrust on account of the acts of that ‘fool-band of soldiers.’<sup>24</sup>

When it was published, some critics quickly dismissed Jackson’s work as overly reliant on appeals to emotion or simply as the work of a “sentimentalist.” J.P. Dunn, Jr., one of her contemporaries who came to substantially different conclusions about Sand Creek and what it meant, called her “one of the most active and intelligent friends [Indians] ever had.”<sup>25</sup> Jackson was certainly a passionate advocate for a particular point of view. She composed her ideas as writers were slowly shifting from Romanticism to Realism.<sup>26</sup> But *A Century of Dishonor* was not written to be a bit of sedate summer reading; it was a reformer’s call to arms. Jackson used carefully-chosen language to call for large-scale revision of the dominant narrative of Sand Creek and other accounts of Native-white interaction. She engaged in written debate with William Byers – a Denver publisher and Chivington defender who claimed that Jackson could not be trusted because she had not been in Denver in 1864. She used empirical facts and analysis to counter Byers’ bluster and ad hominem attacks.<sup>27</sup> She argued that Sand Creek was not a just battle against a belligerent enemy, nor the result of a single overzealous commander, but rather a symptom of a much larger problem: the federal government’s practice of signing Indian treaties that the government never intended to honor.

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<sup>24</sup> Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, 88.

<sup>25</sup> J.P. Dunn, Jr., *Massacres of the Mountains: A History of the Indian Wars of the Far West* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1886), 121n.

<sup>26</sup> Kate Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003), 32-34.

<sup>27</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 216-217.

Jackson was among the first to assert that Native Americans deserved voices in accounts of events involving them. While Chivington's defenders would continue to write histories explaining how "we" were threatened by "savages," and that Chivington had saved "us" through his "gallantry," Jackson forcefully argued that "we" were not in agreement about that, and that "they" were frequently the target of "our" treachery and violence. Seeking the truth about Sand Creek and other violent encounters between whites and Native Americans, Jackson argued, meant seeking justice for those who had been harmed by those encounters. Yet despite Jackson's formidable efforts, the pro-Chivington school of thought would have the upper hand for decades, and Jackson would stand out as a rare but notable early critic of the cavalry's actions at Sand Creek.

### **1886: An Early Attempt at Consensus**

In his 1886 assessment of violent Native-white encounters *Massacres of the Mountains*, the historian, journalist, and author Jacob Piatt Dunn attempted to analyze the events of Sand Creek objectively. Dunn had worked as a reporter in Denver and in Leadville, Colorado, during which time he had been inspired to write *Massacres of the Mountains*.<sup>28</sup> Secretary of the Indiana Historical Society from 1886 until his death in 1924, Dunn relied heavily on many of the same archival sources that Jackson had, especially the transcripts of the various military and Congressional hearings on the matter. He also examined the personal correspondence of several of the officers. Dunn also acknowledged the controversy over the meaning of Sand Creek. But where Jackson sought justice, Dunn sought consensus.

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<sup>28</sup> Ray E. Boomhower, *Jacob Piatt Dunn, Jr.: A Life in History and Politics, 1855-1924* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana Historical Society, 1997), 12-15.

Dunn began his monograph by arguing that while disease outbreaks following contact with Europeans had indeed claimed the lives of a substantial majority of the inhabitants of North America, Native Americans' pre-contact lifestyle was nonetheless unsustainable. Indians themselves had wiped out great numbers of buffalo before white settlement west of the Mississippi, he claimed, so unless Natives became "civilized Indians," they would continue to suffer and die. This would be impossible to accomplish, however, while the government forcibly removed Native Americans from their ancestral homelands. "If the Indian is to be civilized," Dunn contended, "he must first be brought into a complacent state of mind. You may force a man to do right, but you cannot force him to think right. You cannot compel him to be contented."<sup>29</sup> Dunn dismissed the "vanishing Indian" myth that was growing in popularity at the time, albeit in a backhanded and paternalistic way. He contended there would probably be more Indians in the United States in the late twentieth century than there were in the late nineteenth, especially "if they receive such treatment as they are usually supposed to receive under 'the humane policy'" of government-directed civilization.<sup>30</sup> As long as Native Americans adopted white ways and lived up to the full measure of American citizenship to the degree that they could, Dunn argued, they might not flourish, but they would at least survive into the next century.

Like Jackson, Dunn mentioned many Indian leaders by name, devoting particular attention to Black Kettle, Left Hand, and Bull Bear. He also examined the participation of cultural intermediaries such as Jim Smith, Jim Beckwourth, and George Bent. He detailed the activities of white officers John Chivington, Scott Anthony, and Edward Wynkoop,

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<sup>29</sup> Dunn, *Massacres of the Mountains*, 3-5, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Dunn, *Massacres of the Mountains*, 7.

among others. However, the white dissenter Captain Silas Soule, who had refused Chivington's order to attack and was vilified by Chivington's supporters for it, remained curiously absent from Dunn's otherwise-thorough accounting of the individuals involved. Dunn moved away from the language of "savage" versus "civilization," and acknowledged distinctions between the semi-autonomous bands whom whites encountered on the plains. But Dunn still divided Indians into "friendly" and "hostile" groups and leaders. This implied common cause between white settlers and Dunn's contemporary readers; "friendly" Indians were those who were friendly to "us." Additionally, Dunn spent a great deal of time pointing out that the people camped at Sand Creek were never given a promise of immunity by Governor Evans or by Chivington.<sup>31</sup> This assertion, while accurate, drew attention away from the fact that Black Kettle and the other Sand Creek chiefs had made extensive efforts to accommodate white authorities' demands, and served to imply not only that Chivington's later actions were justified, but that Black Kettle and the other chiefs never should have expected safety in exchange for obedience.

On the Indian casualty totals, Dunn split the difference between what he described as the Indians' conceded losses of 140 – close to the present-day scholarly consensus – and Chivington's estimate of 500-600, putting the number at 300. It is not clear how Dunn arrived at this figure. It is possible it was an attempt to square the circle of controversy by providing an arbitrary mean.

In addition, Dunn went to great lengths to justify white brutality by repeatedly describing Indian violence. Killing Indian women and children was justified, Dunn

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<sup>31</sup> Dunn, *Massacres of the Mountains*, 347-351.

averred, because Indian women often fought alongside men on the plains (no word from Dunn as to whether Indian infants did the same). Dunn did not dispute that Sand Creek was a deliberate act of vengeance by Chivington and his men, but strongly implied that pursuit of vengeance was justified. “There is a certain amount of justice in the theory of meting to a man in his own measure, and the people of Colorado had old scores to pay in the accounts of murder, robbery, and rape. The treatment of women, by any Indians, is usually bad, but by the plains Indians especially so.”<sup>32</sup> The earliest newspaper accounts of Sand Creek had made similar arguments, saying that the militiamen had “donned the regimentals for the purpose of protecting the women of the country, by ridding it of red skins.”<sup>33</sup> The supposed protection of white women’s virtue was a cause for which white American men in the late Nineteenth Century were willing to commit tremendously sadistic violence, as African Americans in the South were well aware.<sup>34</sup>

Dunn assumed that his readership was white, or at least non-Indian, and often used “us” and “them” to describe non-Indians and Indians in the aggregate. His tone was often paternalistic, appealing to what “we” needed to do to help Indians out of their terrible predicament. However, one of the central concerns of *Massacres of the Mountains* was to argue that in confronting past wrong behavior by whites, white authorities often committed additional injustices through broken treaties, inefficient and often absent law enforcement, white exploitation of that vacuum in law enforcement, and

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<sup>32</sup> Dunn, *Massacres of the Mountains*, 356-357.

<sup>33</sup> “ARRIVAL OF THE THIRD REGIMENT—GRAND MARCH THRO TOWN,” *Daily Rocky Mountain News*, December 22, 1864, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 2, 26-28, 140-142, 201. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 201-206.

inadequate support for Indian agencies. It would be best for everyone, Dunn asserted, if whites did more to help Native Americans become “civilized,” arguing that “if the government and the people will supplement these efforts by the observance of common honesty and good faith, if an intelligent effort is made to prevent wrong and remove disturbing causes, by the close of the century the Indian will almost be lost in the American.”<sup>35</sup> Dunn certainly appeared to be arguing in favor of the emergent Indian boarding schools, the most familiar of which had been founded at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, just seven years before the publication of Dunn’s monograph. Indeed, it is difficult to read this passage without being reminded of Carlisle founder Richard Henry Pratt’s pronouncement that the best way to address the complicated relationship between Native Americans and United States government and culture was to “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”<sup>36</sup> More recent scholarship has correctly identified Indian boarding schools’ forced cultural assimilation programs as a form of “ethnic cleansing.”<sup>37</sup> It was a new way of waging war against Indians that, as David Wallace Adams adroitly explains, “would be ideological and psychological, and would be waged against children.”<sup>38</sup> So while Dunn’s work reflected a sense of legitimate obligation to address real wrongs committed by whites against Native Americans throughout American history, it was also informed by a growing intellectual camp that countenanced cultural genocide.

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<sup>35</sup> Dunn, *Massacres of the Mountains*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, from an 1892 speech, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/> Accessed October 29, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 6-8.

<sup>38</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 27.

In the concluding paragraphs of *Massacres of the Mountains*' Sand Creek chapter, Dunn insisted that he had no opinion as to whether Chivington's actions were wrong, but instead simply situated Sand Creek on a long continuum of white massacres of Native Americans. Yes, it was a massacre, Dunn said, and women and children were killed, and massacres are terrible, but sometimes they are necessary. Besides, Dunn observed, Americans had done worse in the past.<sup>39</sup> Dunn's analysis, then, tended toward the massacre school of thought on Sand Creek in its language and selection of source material, but ultimately gave credence to the idea of Sand Creek as justified vengeance. Despite his praise for Jackson, Dunn's work gave Chivington's defenders rhetorical support with a scholarly air.

### **1889: Frank Hall's Grand History and Chivington's Continued Influence**

The narrative arc regarding Sand Creek in General Frank Hall's massive four-volume *History of the State of Colorado*, published in 1889, was consistent with 1860s newspaper reports, as well as with Junius E. Wharton and J.P. Dunn's early historical accounts, in that it framed Sand Creek as the inevitable and justified response to antecedent Indian violence.

Before even encountering Hall's analysis of Sand Creek, however, readers of *History of the State of Colorado* would first learn about John Chivington as the swashbuckling commander of Union volunteers as they fought Confederate General Henry Hopkins Sibley's forces at Glorieta Pass in March 1862. The skirmish ultimately resulted in a Confederate retreat from New Mexico Territory, and the Confederacy was

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<sup>39</sup> Dunn, *Massacres of the Mountains*, 370-372.

forced to abandon attempts to secure western mineral resources via occupation of the area. “Though wholly unskilled in the science of war,” Hall noted, “with but little knowledge of drill and discipline, Major Chivington, of herculean frame and gigantic stature, possessed the courage and exhibited the discreet boldness, dash and brilliancy in action which distinguished the more illustrious of our volunteer officers during the war.”<sup>40</sup> Hall’s glowing appraisal of Chivington’s military prowess did not stop there. “His daring and rapid movement across the mountains, and the total destruction of the enemy’s trains simultaneously with the battle of Pigeon’s Ranch, again attested his excellent generalship. It put an end to the war by forcing the invaders to precipitate flight back to their homes.”<sup>41</sup> Despite lacking military training, John Chivington’s actions stopped the entire Civil War in 1862. While an 1889 audience would likely recognize this claim as hyperbole – they would know Lee’s surrender at Appomattox was still three years away – Hall’s characterization of Chivington as a bold, decisive, and courageous military leader was established well before the reader reached the chapter on Sand Creek.

Hall opened that chapter by describing “the revolting cruelties visited upon the women and children who were carried into captivity by these bloodthirsty and always lecherous monsters.”<sup>42</sup> As in prior accounts, Hall portrayed Native Americans as licentious barbarians who threatened white women’s virtue. Hall correctly named many of the key individuals but identified Indian groups inconsistently and often incorrectly.

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<sup>40</sup> Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado: Embracing Accounts of the Pre-Historic Races and Their Remains; the Earliest Spanish, French and American Explorations; the Lives of the Primitive Hunters, Trappers and Traders; the Commerce of the Prairies; the First American Settlements Founded; the Original Discoveries of Gold in the Rocky Mountains; the Development of Cities and Towns, with the Various Phases of Industrial and Political Transition, from 1858 to 1890* (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Company, 1889), 287.

<sup>41</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 287.

<sup>42</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 336.

Hall referred to “Indians” as a monolith when asserting their “hostile intent,” despite having identified particular tribes and even sub-groupings within tribes. Hall described the violence of the spring and summer of 1864 as a war between “the races,” incorrectly suggesting the existence of a pan-Indian coalition.<sup>43</sup>

Hall also described these “red men” as essentially more violent and brutal than whites. “I cannot discover any difference between a white and a red murderer,” Hall claimed, “except that the latter is somewhat more barbarous.”<sup>44</sup> Hall’s analysis incorrectly suggested that all Plains Indians fought all whites and that their divisions were based wholly on racial identity. This position summarily dismissed the possibility that semi-autonomous bands of native people resisted ongoing physical displacement and violent subordination by white authorities through both violent and non-violent means. Despite repeated acknowledgements of the efforts of Black Kettle and the other peace chiefs, “Indians,” Hall argued, were at war with whites.

Hall’s account of the massacre appears at first glance to be sourced from official testimonies and other reliable primary accounts. A closer look reveals the far greater weight and authority attributed to the testimony by Chivington and Major Scott Anthony, Chivington’s principal defender among his subordinate officers. As in Dunn’s synthesis, Silas Soule, Chivington’s foremost detractor, does not appear at all. Hall claimed Indians committed scalpings and other bodily dismemberments either during the attack or before Chivington arrived, demonstrating the Indians’ warlike intent. As to the taking of body parts as souvenirs by Chivington’s men, however, “the witnesses differ widely.”<sup>45</sup> Hall

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<sup>43</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 339.

<sup>44</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 354.

<sup>45</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 347.

did acknowledge that Chivington's soldiers committed many shocking and gruesome acts against women and children. But unlike his descriptions of Indian violence earlier in the chapter, however, the author provided no specific details, and these acts were immediately excused as the inevitable reaction of settlers upon seeing people who they believed to be terrorizing their communities:

That many horrible scenes occurred on this battlefield, the work of infuriated soldiers when their enemies were at their mercy, is undeniable. I have personally listened to the tales of some of the perpetrators of deeds which they themselves committed, that caused my blood to run cold, and forced me to blush with shame that any human being could have been so inhuman, and in two instances they related to the slaughter of women and children who fell into their hands. And their warrant for it was that Chivington had commanded that no prisoners be taken. Whether the battle of Sand Creek was right or wrong, these fiendish acts can never be palliated, nor can there ever be in this world or the next any pardon for the men who were responsible for them. It was this more than any other stain attaching to this historic tragedy which brought the condemnation of mankind upon the leaders of that terrible day, and which, strive as we may to efface it, will remain as the deliberate judgment of history.<sup>46</sup>

Hall then suddenly reversed course. He suggested that such acts were never justified, saying "It will not do, as some have done, to fall back to the atrocities of the Indians upon our people as a justification."<sup>47</sup> Like Dunn, Hall took pains to assert that certain atrocities were inherently immoral, but followed those assertions with explanations of why those atrocities might be acceptable in this case.

Hall produced his grand history for the Rocky Mountain Historical Company while John Chivington and many of his friends were still alive. Indeed, Chivington himself is listed in the acknowledgements as having personally provided access to

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<sup>46</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 350-351.

<sup>47</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 351.

important documents. Particularly revealing is the choice of a portrait to accompany the account of Chivington's exploits at Glorieta Pass. It was not the portrait of Chivington as the steely-eyed forty-one-year-old volunteer cavalry commander of 1862 – the portrait that usually accompanied later accounts of the gruesome acts committed by men acting on his orders in 1864. It was, instead, a portrait of the white-bearded leading citizen of Denver he was in 1889 when the book was published.<sup>48</sup> This was Chivington, Hall intoned. Not the monster of Sand Creek, but the dashing hero of Glorieta Pass, and the elder statesman of the city of Denver.

Historians cannot deliberately present accounts of the past from the perspective of one side of a conflict without marginalizing and diminishing the others. Hall wrote his volume from Chivington's perspective, relying heavily on his testimony, and that of other still living key participants in the Sand Creek massacre. Chivington and Anthony both lived in Denver and were active in social organizations there. While presenting an openly partisan account of the most controversial event in Colorado's short history at that point, Hall nonetheless revealed a degree of unease about Sand Creek. Hall's *History* was prepared for a Colorado audience while Chivington and many of his supporters still held political and cultural sway there, and it shows.

The Chivington-as-savior school had another influential historical synthesis in its camp. William Clarke Whitford would quote Hall's characterization of the New Mexico campaign and of the "dashing" Chivington's role in it in the conclusion of his 1906 study of the Civil War volunteers from Colorado.<sup>49</sup> Other later pro-Chivington works would

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<sup>48</sup> Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, 276.

<sup>49</sup> William Clarke Whitford, *Colorado Volunteers in the Civil War: The New Mexico Campaign in 1862* (Denver, Colorado: The State Historical and Natural History Society, 1906), 153-154.

also cite Hall as an authoritative secondary source.<sup>50</sup> Despite early attempts at historical syntheses of Sand Creek that relied upon an appropriately wide range of solid primary sources, the continuing influence of Chivington's supporters in the retelling of the event would lend credence to the idea of Sand Creek as a just and valiant exercise. In attempting an authoritative, magisterial history of Colorado going back to the sixteenth century travels of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Hall was ultimately unable to escape the politics of nineteenth century Denver.

### **1911: Captain Ware and the Soldier's Perspective**

The journalist, attorney, poet, and retired cavalry captain Eugene F. Ware's 1911 account *The Indian War of 1864* pushed the non-fiction dialogue even further into Chivington's camp.<sup>51</sup> While he did not name Chivington in his own passage about Glorieta Pass, Ware nonetheless described the adventures of the Colorado volunteers using reverential language. "The Colorado cavalry had been down in New Mexico," Ware wrote, "fought a good fight, and saved that Territory, and they were vindictively loyal, and were inclined to shoot."<sup>52</sup> The veterans of the Indian wars saw loyalty to the point of ruthlessness as a virtue. Vindictive loyalty had indeed helped perpetuate the idea of Sand Creek as a just and necessary battle of civilization against savagery, of a hero against the rampaging hordes.

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<sup>50</sup> Reginald S. Craig, *The Fighting Parson: The Biography of Colonel John M. Chivington* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959), 19.

<sup>51</sup> Biographical information from the Kansas Historical Society website, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/eugene-ware/16536> Accessed October 27, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864: Being a Fragment of the Early History of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming* (Topeka, Kansas: Crane & Company, 1911), 280.

Ware expressed full-throated support for Chivington's beliefs about Native Americans and used similarly dehumanizing language. Black Kettle, White Antelope, and other peace chiefs came to the Camp Weld conference near Denver to meet with Edward Wynkoop, Silas Soule, and other white officers in an attempt to find a path to accommodation. But Ware characterized the conference as a miserable failure at best, and possibly a diversionary tactic intended to enable other Indians to conduct raids while the officers were busy near the city. Ware described young Native American men as "bucks," a common dehumanizing descriptor, and said "[they] were a bad lot. They all needed killing, and the more they were fed and taken care of the worse they became."<sup>53</sup> Indians were a monolith to Ware. They were inherently dangerous, and incapable of dealing honestly with white men. They needed to be wiped out.

Chivington was the only white officer Ware mentioned by name, and he mentioned no Indians by name. In Ware's account, Chivington marched out amidst hostile forces in two feet of snow. Ware used Chivington's casualty count of around 500, and noted that nine white soldiers died. This, Ware asserted, was a sign that "the Indians put up a pretty good fight."<sup>54</sup> Ware insisted that Sand Creek was a legitimate battle against a hostile force, and that only "the humanitarians of Boston" called it a massacre.<sup>55</sup> Ware argued that the post-Sand Creek retributive campaigns by Plains Indians revealed not a people under siege responding to horrific violence, but evidence of insufficient extermination of Indians by whites. Chivington's error, Ware argued, was not that he slaughtered peaceful Indians at Sand Creek, but that he did not slaughter enough of them.

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<sup>53</sup> Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, 308.

<sup>54</sup> Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, 309.

<sup>55</sup> Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, 309.

Ware claimed his was a fair account of Sand Creek, but he ended up supporting Chivington's position. Thanks to toxic popular ideas about charitable forced elimination of Indian culture, Ware began and finished in a pro-Chivington position. He never attempted to provide an even-handed account. His was the account of a soldier, a veteran officer of the Indian wars, and as he saw it, that perspective required loyalty to successful commanders such as Colonel John Chivington, and hatred of the Indian enemy. Not surprisingly, Silas Soule is absent from Ware's narrative. The presence of an officer who was loyal to the Union, but also to greater principles like human decency, and brave enough to stand up to someone as formidable as Chivington in defense of those loyalties, would have challenged Ware's entire account of Sand Creek.

#### **1914: A Soldier Defends his Old Colonel**

While Eugene Ware learned about Sand Creek from the military periphery, Irving Howbert presented the account of an eyewitness.<sup>56</sup> Howbert argued that Sand Creek was a battle against belligerents who constituted an unprovoked existential threat. Howbert was eighteen years old in 1864, a member of one of the first families to settle in what became the city of Colorado Springs in El Paso County sixty miles south of Denver. Indian raids on convoys agitated the people of El Paso County just as they had Denverites, and Howbert volunteered to fight the raiders several times. Perhaps this explains why Howbert's memoir showed a far more nuanced understanding of Native American culture and tribal hierarchies than any of the other pro-Chivington narratives in

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<sup>56</sup> 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), ix.

this study. Nevertheless, his language revealed that he saw Sand Creek as a conflict between Native savagery and white civilization. Howbert argued that settlers like himself were threatened by “hordes of hostile savages,” and if Chivington had not defended them at Sand Creek the settlers would have been wiped out.<sup>57</sup>

Howbert’s monograph defended Chivington in many of the same ways previous accounts had. Like Hall, Howbert’s volume included the 1890s portrait of the elder Chivington, as opposed to his military portrait from the 1860s.<sup>58</sup> Howbert’s account of the militia’s attack squared with others at first. He described how the militia marched through a snowstorm, quietly scattered the camp’s ponies, and then attacked the camp. Howbert claimed that none of the soldiers shot any women or children on purpose. Some women were killed, Howbert argued, not due to the soldiers’ malice, but because “[it] was utterly impossible, at a distance of two hundred yards, to discern between the sexes, on account of their similarity of dress.”<sup>59</sup> By Howbert’s estimation, inappropriate clothing was apparently to blame for the women’s deaths.

Howbert claimed that after the battle, he and his comrades noticed that “[the] camp was overflowing with proof that these Indians were among those who had been raiding the settlements of Colorado during the previous summer,” but did not specify what evidence he and the others found.<sup>60</sup> Unlike many other pro-Chivington authors, Howbert acknowledged that the Dog Soldiers – a cadre of young, well-armed Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota men who wanted to fight – were camped on the Smoky Hill trail,

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<sup>57</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 116.

<sup>59</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 104.

<sup>60</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 110.

and that Chivington knew this, and chose not to attack them after Sand Creek. Howbert framed this decision, however, as a sign of Chivington's great military acumen:

I never understood why we did not follow up our victory by an attack upon the hostile bands camped on the Smoky Hill River, but I assume it was on account of our regiment's inferior horses, arms, and equipment. Probably Colonel Chivington, taking this into consideration, thought his force not strong enough to fight such a large party successfully.<sup>61</sup>

Chivington passed on attacking the formidable Dog Soldiers, Howbert reasoned, not because his somewhat undisciplined volunteers were not up to the task. It simply did not make sense from a military standpoint to engage a better-equipped enemy right after a major battle when the soldiers' enlistments were set to expire and the colonel had already imposed his form of retributive justice upon the Plains Indians.

Howbert devoted two chapters of his memoir to a lengthy defense of Chivington's actions at Sand Creek. Howbert appears to have understood Native Americans better than other Chivington defenders, though he understood them as sub-human savages. His account revealed a critical misunderstanding of Native American hierarchy. Though they may have been part of other tribes, Indians were a hostile monolith to Howbert. The author includes a number of testimonial records and correspondences, including a letter from Black Kettle and other peace chiefs to the federal Indian Agent, Major S.G. Colley. Howbert's response to that letter shows how his misunderstanding of tribal organization led him to interpret the Cheyennes as a hostile monolith (all italics and brackets are Howbert's):

Black Kettle says in his letter: 'We received a letter from Bent, wishing us to make peace.' Why did Bent send a letter to *friendly* Indians, and want to make peace with Indians *who had always been friendly*? Again they say: 'We have held a council in regard to it.' Why did they hold a council in regard to making peace, when they were already peaceable? Again they

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<sup>61</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike's Peak Region*, 112.

say: ‘All come to the conclusion to *make peace* with you *providing* you make peace with the Kiowas, Comanches, Arapahoes, Apaches, and Sioux. We have seven prisoners of yours, which we are willing to give up, providing you give up yours. There are three *war* [not *peace*] *parties* out yet, and two of Arapahoes.’ Every line of this letter shows that they were and had been at war.<sup>62</sup>

Black Kettle had acknowledged that there were Native Americans at war with whites, but also that he sought peace. Black Kettle had indeed sought peace. Those Cheyenne and Arapaho people that did not wish to fight had gone to Sand Creek in no small part because the widely-respected peace chief had led them there. The Dog Soldiers also belonged to those same tribes (and others), but wished to fight for their land. Howbert’s misunderstanding of “Cheyennes” or even “Indians” as monoliths led him to believe that because Black Kettle was a widely respected chief of the Cheyennes, and because some Cheyennes continued to fight, that Black Kettle’s appeals for peace were disingenuous.

This was a calamitous misinterpretation, and one that could certainly have been avoided by involving Native American voices in the discussion. Howbert did not include such voices, except when stripping them of context as he did Black Kettle’s. For Howbert, Native Americans were “savages” who needed to be “handled.”<sup>63</sup> Directly responding to Helen Hunt Jackson, Howbert contended that the “Century of Dishonor” had been so shameful because there had been too little domination of Indians by the federal government, and too few Sand Creeks.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 128.

<sup>63</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 183.

<sup>64</sup> Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 183-184.

## **1915: Dr. Grinnell's New Scholarly Approach to the West**

By 1900, few sources other than Helen Hunt Jackson's 1881 *A Century of Dishonor* had attempted to provide a non-fiction account of Sand Creek that included the voices of Native American survivors of the event. In the 1910s, that would change. The naturalist, anthropologist, and historian George Bird Grinnell accompanied cavalry expeditions onto the plains, and met with native people there. Through interviews and observation, he compiled anthropological and historical accounts of Native Americans, particularly the Cheyennes, beginning with *The Fighting Cheyennes* in 1915. Like Dunn, Hall, and Jackson before him, he also drew from Congressional records and other official testimonies. He also corresponded with George Bent, the son of white trader William Bent and his Cheyenne wife Owl Woman. George Bent had survived Sand Creek, and could help provide something previous accounts of Sand Creek had lacked: a retelling centered on the Indian experience there.

Grinnell's use of language is strikingly different from previous historians of Sand Creek. In his formulation, Sand Creek was a "massacre."<sup>65</sup> Grinnell referred to Indians by their tribe or their individual names, and the patronizing descriptions of "bucks," "squaws," and "papooses" were gone. Grinnell did not lead readers by guessing at Natives' intentions or suggesting they possessed an essential tendency toward brutality. Instead Grinnell described their actions. Almost everyone who was conspicuously absent from the earlier accounts could be found in Grinnell's narrative. Captain Soule still did not appear by name, but the First Regiment, within which Soule was a company commander, "acted kindly and took little or no part in the scalping and mutilating" that

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<sup>65</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), ix, 176, 249.

followed the attack.<sup>66</sup> Colonel Chivington was present, as were most of the rest of his officers, but so were the Arapaho chief Left Hand and the Cheyenne chiefs Black Kettle, White Antelope, Standing Water, One Eye, War Bonnet, Spotted Crow, Two Thighs, Bear Man, Yellow Shield, and Yellow Wolf.<sup>67</sup> Jackson's account had been a call to arms intended to inform white Americans of a grave injustice and inspire action to rectify it. Grinnell, too, sought to dispel ignorance, but through careful, dispassionate scholarly analysis using the widest and deepest possible selection of primary source material. Finally, then, Sand Creek was getting a serious academic treatment.

Grinnell reconstructed the events of November 29, 1864, based upon what the participants' interviews and testimonies revealed, not on what he believed their overarching motivations to be. Instead of asserting that various soldiers killed and mutilated women and children after the initial attack, for example, Grinnell cited records of specific mutilations. "Lieutenant Olney, of the First Colorado Cavalry," Grinnell wrote, "swore at the investigation in 1865 that he saw Lieutenant Richmond, of the Third Colorado Cavalry, shoot and scalp three women and five children who had been captured by some soldiers and were being conducted to camp."<sup>68</sup> Grinnell concluded that Sand Creek was an "unprovoked attack on an unsuspecting community that had been promised protection by government officials, and on the faith of that protection had put themselves in the hands of the troops."<sup>69</sup> Through this careful examination of official records and by actively seeking out Native American sources to provide the other side of the picture, Grinnell was able to make observations founded less upon nineteenth-century politics

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<sup>66</sup> Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 174 n18.

<sup>67</sup> Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 173.

<sup>68</sup> Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 176.

than upon analytical techniques that would later be adopted by post-World War II social historians.

### **1918: For a Tourist Audience, Great Beauty and a Bit of Ugliness**

In 1918, writer Mae Lacy Baggs published *Colorado: Queen Jewel of the Rockies*. Handsomely bound and filled with photographs, some of them in color, the book was part of a series of volumes intended to encourage tourism within the United States. The emphasis on automobile travel and the \$3.50 price per volume (approximately \$55.24 in 2015 dollars) reveal its intended audience of middle- and upper-income travelers.<sup>70</sup> *Queen Jewel* was a literary means to encourage those who were able to come visit Colorado's cities and to witness the state's spectacular mountains and plains. Although tourist promotion seems like an unlikely source for commentary on controversial subject matter, Baggs included a few brief mentions of Sand Creek, acknowledging it as a massacre and describing its perpetrators as shameful. During the decade prior to the publication of Baggs' volume, George Bent had been struggling to put forth a Native-centered historical narrative of Sand Creek.<sup>71</sup> As Native American voices continued to be marginalized, it was becoming ever more important to recognize the central importance of the idea of Sand Creek in books aimed at general audiences.

Baggs described the native people of Colorado using several themes common in white writings about Native Americans in the early twentieth century. The Indian was essentially different from the white man: noble but doomed. Baggs took care to name and

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<sup>70</sup> United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website, data.bls.gov, accessed September 16, 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 34-35.

describe many of the nations who had lived in the area now known as Colorado long before colonists arrived and assigned it that name. She noted their distinctness while describing alliances and enmities as she understood them. However, she still made generalizations that implied Indians were a monolith. “The Indian is wont to be pictured as sullen and stoical,” Baggs observed. “Nothing could be farther from the truth. It has been related by many – traders, scouts, explorers – that these Indians were a merry, good-natured people in their camps and villages. Many of these tribes who have been removed from their hunting grounds to Oklahoma I have personally visited, and even in the face of the fact that they were forcibly removed and have been grossly mistreated by government mismanagement since, they are a happy people.”<sup>72</sup> Baggs then described Native Americans as “a race so removed from our mental status and manner of living,” suggesting an unassailable essential division between natives and whites.

Baggs sometimes made inelegant word choices in describing Native Americans and their experience in Colorado. For instance, she used the language of the noble savage and used the term “squaw” to describe Indian women. Most salient to this study, however, Baggs described Sand Creek as a massacre, not a battle.<sup>73</sup> By means of this word choice, Baggs stood with those writers who took a particular position in the still-simmering controversy. She stood with Helen Hunt Jackson.

In a section on “Colorado Intellectuals,” Baggs described Jackson’s career. As we’ve seen, Jackson’s writing was among the earliest to critically analyze the events of Sand Creek and argue that Native Americans had been mistreated by private individuals and government officials who were often deliberately disingenuous and wantonly violent.

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<sup>72</sup> Mae Lacy Baggs, *Colorado: The Queen Jewel of the Rockies* (Boston: The Page Company, 1918), 39-40.

<sup>73</sup> Baggs, *Colorado*, 41, 333.

“It isn’t to be wondered at that the Indian conditions – the recent Sand Creek massacre was still on every tongue – should arouse in this broad-visioned, tender-hearted writer [Jackson] a desire to awaken the government to a sense of duty toward the Red Man. She was certain that the Indian, if properly treated, could be made a respectable, law-abiding citizen.”<sup>74</sup> Baggs did not address questions of Indian sovereignty – did Native Americans want to be citizens, and did they really need an outside force to make them respectable and law-abiding? But she did acknowledge forced removal and white deception.

Baggs’ description of Native Americans often makes use of the “noble savage” stereotype: the notion that Indians were the honorable and virtuous victims of white violence. In extolling Jackson’s works, Baggs chose to take a position on a controversial subject and thereby lend credence to the notion of Sand Creek as a shameful massacre while directing it at a general audience. Writing a work intended for tourist promotion, she subtly noted that despite the great accomplishments of the people who lived among the stunning landscapes evoked in *Queen Jewel*, settlers were not entirely a civilizing influence. Baggs quietly acknowledged that to take possession of their state’s legendary beauty, Coloradans had done some very ugly things.

### **1933: Consensus Sought but Not Found**

While conducting research for his 1933 text *Colorado: The Story of a Western Commonwealth*, Colorado State Historian and University of Denver History Professor LeRoy R. Hafen consulted with George Bird Grinnell on Native American history and culture. Grinnell was an excellent source for such information. A profoundly influential

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<sup>74</sup> Baggs, *Colorado*, 333-334.

historian of the American West, Hafen was uniquely poised to influence public and scholarly opinion about controversial events of the past. Hafen's account of Sand Creek, however, often engaged in the sort of sweeping generalizations and paternalistic attitudes that filled earlier accounts of Sand Creek – critical flaws that Grinnell himself had meticulously avoided. “The Indian had strong primitive emotions,” Hafen wrote. “He was cruel; delighted in revenge, enjoyed the torture of an enemy. In war he neither gave nor asked quarter. He was vain, superstitious, sensitive to ridicule, childlike.”<sup>75</sup> Hafen described “Indians” as cruel and childish men. In yet another non-fiction account of Sand Creek, the author described Native Americans as a monolith, and a gendered one at that. Hafen's “Indian” was also an Other. “We” dealt with “them” in Hafen's account, and “they” engaged in barbaric cruelty, while “we” advanced civilization. In other passages, Hafen correctly identified plains peoples as belonging to distinct bands of people that followed particular chiefs' authority.<sup>76</sup>

Hafen also coupled the brute savage stereotype with the noble savage stereotype, sometimes in the same paragraph. “[In] contrast to our own social conditions,” Hafen affirmed, “there was never feasting in one lodge and starving in another... The Indian was a loyal friend and his promised word was sacred. To him the wilful [sic] breaking of treaties by the white men was as shocking as the Indian barbaric cruelties were to the civilized mind.”<sup>77</sup> This coupling of these competing and contradictory stereotypes would later be seen in films such as *The Guns of Fort Petticoat* (1957) and *Dances with Wolves*

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<sup>75</sup> LeRoy R. Hafen, *Colorado: The Story of a Western Commonwealth* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1933), 55.

<sup>76</sup> Hafen, *Colorado*, 169-170.

<sup>77</sup> Hafen, *Colorado*, 55-56.

(1990). Indeed, Hafen himself declared that the portrayal of Native Americans in American popular culture had become “unfaithful” and “grotesque” in his own time.<sup>78</sup>

In describing the events of November 29, 1864, Hafen acknowledged the controversy over Sand Creek, and, just as in earlier accounts, the author attempted to avoid taking sides. But as we have seen with earlier accounts, “not taking sides” was also a side of sorts. An author’s framing of the events of Sand Creek revealed that author’s perspective on the controversy. Hafen used Chivington’s own inaccurate and boastful Indian casualty estimate of five hundred without any qualifying statement. Correctly identifying Sand Creek as a tremendously controversial event, Hafen chose not to identify it either as a “battle” or a “massacre,” using instead the innocuous descriptor “affair.” “Some have called it a ‘battle,’ in which the Indians got their just desserts,” Hafen wrote, “while others have condemned it as an unjustifiable ‘massacre’ of peaceful Indians.”<sup>79</sup> Hafen’s monograph was a general history aimed at both scholarly and general audiences. However, in not saying which authors constituted the respective “battle” and “massacre” schools of thought, Hafen constructed a critically misleading false equivalency.

As shown earlier in this chapter, those writers defended Chivington had engaged in dehumanizing descriptions of Native Americans, defended white violence as a civilizing force, and often had some personal connection to the military or to Chivington himself. Those that criticized Chivington more often described Native Americans as human beings with human motives, and were more likely to seek out Native American perspectives on the matter, either directly or indirectly. Hafen lent equal weight to both

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<sup>78</sup> Hafen, *Colorado*, 57-58.

<sup>79</sup> Hafen, *Colorado*, 171.

schools of thought. Hafen wrote brief accounts of Sand Creek in several of his works, and his ambivalence on the matter is evident in all of them. In his 1926 history of the overland mail system, he wrote that Grinnell's thorough account and Howbert's more thinly-sourced work were both "instructive" and "[gave] the story from opposite points of view."<sup>80</sup> His later sweeping survey of the West also lent equal weight to the "battle" and "massacre" schools of thought.<sup>81</sup>

As State Historian, Hafen was tasked with writing the accounts of Sand Creek that would appear on a roadside memorial obelisk erected near the site of the massacre in 1950. Hafen's reluctance to take a position on Sand Creek showed in those memorials, just as in his earlier syntheses. Earlier monuments, such as the 1909 Civil War monument at the Colorado State Capitol, had contextualized Sand Creek as a Civil War "battle." By 1950, however, Hafen appeared unwilling to place the event in the context of the "just" Civil War when the memory of Sand Creek had become more openly contested.<sup>82</sup> On the 1950 monument, as in Hafen's 1933 textbook, a great historian ultimately produced accounts of Sand Creek whose purpose was to satisfy everyone, but that few found satisfactory.

### **1959: The Fighting Parson**

In the years following World War II, increased access to postsecondary and postgraduate education and scholarly skepticism of pre-war historical methods helped

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<sup>80</sup> LeRoy R. Hafen, *The Overland Mail, 1849-1869: Promoter of Settlement, Precursor of Railroads* (New York: AMS Press, 1926), 262n567.

<sup>81</sup> LeRoy R. Hafen, *Western America: The Exploration, Settlement, and Development of the Region Beyond the Mississippi* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1941), 518-520.

<sup>82</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 53-55.

lead to the decentralized and messy emergence of social history. Instead of examining history from the top down, social historians sought to look at the systems and processes of the entirety of society from the bottom up. These historians turned away from narrative and toward analysis, producing increasingly specialized and narrowly-focused works.<sup>83</sup> Instead of studying great men and their politics, social historians would increasingly focus on the lives of ordinary people. Social historians saw their methods as having a totalizing potential, opening the possibility of building histories of particular social formations into a history of society as a whole.<sup>84</sup> One of this historiographic turn's many important results was a re-imagining of the history of the American West as a space of conquest wherein white settlers sought to establish and maintain settlements through violence and intimidation of the Native Americans who already lived there. This re-evaluation prompted a succession of scholarly works as well as popular cultural representations of a variety of historical events of the West.

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<sup>83</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 40-44. Wood argues that the emergence of increasingly specialized monographs from 1960s-1970s social historians and their intellectual successors has led to fragmentation and chaos. The "grand narrative" was limited in its range of sources and subjects, Wood argues, but at least it presented something cohesive, tangible, and accessible to the educated public. "Like some vast protoplasm that divides and subdivides again and again," Wood writes, "history seems to be in the process of self-destruction." (44) The historian of early modern Europe Peter Burke asserts that this fragmentation has led to historians whose interlocutors are more likely to be philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists than other historians. See "Peter Burke," in *The New History: Confessions and Conversations*, ed. Maria Lúcia G. Pallares-Burke (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2002), 147. Despite the chaos generated by this fragmentation, the study of the Sand Creek massacre was substantially aided by the anthropologist (and historian) George Bird Grinnell's particular approach, as well as by the dispassionate analysis of the historian Stan Hoig, whose work I will examine shortly.

<sup>84</sup> Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 13-60. Eley describes this historiographic turn in the English-speaking world as stemming from the confluence of three distinct influences: British Marxist historians, the French *Annales* school, and post-1945 U.S. and British social scientists. "All three," Eley argues, "converged on a materialist model of causality that might also be called 'structuralist.' Its terms implied a master concept of 'society' based on the sovereignty of social explanation, in which the lines of determination ran predominantly upward and outward from the economy and its social relations to everything else. It also implied an integrated or holistic account of the social totality. All three approaches believed actively in cross-disciplinary fertilization. Each was certainly borne by a politics." (26)

Reginald S. Craig reacted to this reevaluation of the history of the West by crafting a glowing biography of John Chivington, unconditionally endorsing his actions with an enthusiasm for white dominance of the West that surpassed even Chivington's most fervent nineteenth-century supporters. Craig immediately acknowledged that he was addressing a controversial issue, but claimed (without presenting any supporting evidence) that most Coloradans believed Sand Creek to be justified. It was a battle, Craig wrote, and an honorable victory for the right people. "The Indian Bureau and many of the colonel's personal enemies," Craig wrote, "succeeded in arranging three hearings with indecisive results, which tended to cast reflections on the honor of the colonel and his men. Based on these rather one-sided congressional and military investigations, some historians have labeled the affair a brutal 'massacre' of friendly Indians."<sup>85</sup>

Craig also listed 1950s popular culture as a source of Chivington's unwarranted infamy. Television series such as *Playhouse 90*, *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*, and *Gunsmoke* had addressed Sand Creek as a shameful event, and this inspired Craig to defend Chivington's honor.<sup>86</sup> These television representations, Craig argued, were "all grossly unfair to Colonel Chivington, and [ranged] from an emphasis on the adverse parts of the evidence produced at the hearings to a complete fabrication entirely at variance with any of the facts, or asserted facts, relative to the campaign."<sup>87</sup> Part of Craig's response was to rely almost entirely on Chivington's testimony and correspondence, and on secondary writings from pro-Chivington sources like J.P. Dunn.

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<sup>85</sup> Craig, *The Fighting Parson*, 10.

<sup>86</sup> I will examine specific film treatments of Sand Creek in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>87</sup> Craig, *The Fighting Parson*, 10.

Craig used language that was openly hostile not only to Native Americans, but to anyone who might think Native perspectives on Sand Creek's meaning should be taken seriously. Craig regularly used the nickname "The Fighting Parson" in place of Chivington's actual name. Throughout the book, he also used dehumanizing language to describe Indians. Native men were all "warriors." Women were all "squaws." Children were all "papooses." Craig constantly described native people as savages, and did so without the use of quotation marks. These were not human beings, he insisted. Their savageness, the author implied, was more essential to their existence than their humanity.

Craig did not argue that the Indian positions in disputes with whites were necessarily wrong. Rather, his language indicated that there was no point in considering the Indian position at all, that examining Indian positions on disputes meant advocating those positions, and taking sides with people whom Chivington considered the enemy. Craig also espoused the idea that the existence of pre-contact enmities, of the cultural esteem placed on successful warriors by the Plains peoples, and of wars between and among Native American groups justified white violence against natives. "The truth was that these Indians enjoyed savage torture and killing," Craig wrote, "and would inflict suffering and massacre on members of other tribes, as well as the whites, entirely without provocation."<sup>88</sup> Because humans had been violent to one another before whites had arrived on the Plains, Craig reasoned, the active pursuit of violence afterwards was acceptable.

As we have seen, many of the histories of white-Native American encounter incorrectly described Indians and particular tribes as monoliths, conflating the

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<sup>88</sup> Craig, *The Fighting Parson*, 156-157.

motivations, interests, and actions of individuals and small bands with those of entire tribes or of Indians in general. Craig also engaged this fallacy when writing about whites. “In dealing with the red men,” Craig wrote, “the settlers were handicapped by the vacillating policy of the Washington authorities, who never had any conception of the magnitude nor nature of the problems they were endeavoring to solve.”<sup>89</sup> There was a war on, Craig argued, and white men were on one side, and “red men” were on the other, and those dithering milquetoasts in Washington just didn’t get it. This position improperly consolidated white men, forcibly subordinated Native men, and removed women from the question entirely. Gone were the white dissenters, many of the peace chiefs, the women who were at Sand Creek, and the women like Helen Hunt Jackson who passionately criticized the government’s actions.

Craig, did, however, correctly criticize the circulation of misleading information about Chivington. A year before they released *The Fighting Parson*, the same publisher had released an account of Confederate activity in New Mexico that incorrectly claimed Chivington had been sentenced to death for his actions at Sand Creek.<sup>90</sup> But *The Fighting Parson*, despite its very good accounting of the New Mexico campaign, would not adequately clarify or validate Chivington’s actions at Sand Creek. Craig could not mount a convincing defense of Chivington’s reputation, as he overemphasized sources that aided his arguments and ignored less helpful ones.<sup>91</sup> Two years after Craig’s work was

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<sup>89</sup> Craig, *The Fighting Parson*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Lee Kerby, *The Confederate Invasion of New Mexico and Arizona 1861-1862* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1958), 82n24. Chivington was called before a military tribunal that strongly criticized his actions, but he was not executed for them, which Kerby’s note strongly implies. Chivington lived almost thirty years after Sand Creek, dying in Denver in 1894 at the age of 73.

<sup>91</sup> Troublingly, recent otherwise excellent works of scholarship on the Civil War in the Southwest have uncritically cited Craig’s work to flesh out biographical details on Chivington, when far stronger scholarly sources now exist. See Robert Lee Kerby, *The Confederate Invasion of New Mexico and Arizona 1861-1862* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1958), 82n24. Others have correctly appraised how Craig’s stubborn

published, however, a writer using the analytical methods of social history would publish a volume that would consider many different perspectives and establish the foundation of the present-day scholarly consensus on Sand Creek.

### **1961: No Easy Answers**

From the very first page of Stan Hoig's *The Sand Creek Massacre*, the author acknowledged the controversy over Sand Creek's memory and challenged two distinct mischaracterizations of the event. Hoig concisely disputed Sand Creek's designation as a "battle" by Chivington supporters, but also the over-emphasis on Chivington by his critics. The latter mischaracterization, Hoig contended, obscured the event's context as part of the conquest of the West by the United States by blaming the wrongs committed on a single rogue commander. Sand Creek was indeed a massacre, but a complicated one that defied simplistic binaries.

Hoig's monograph acknowledged controversy without advocating a side. Indeed, one of Hoig's principal arguments was that implying at all that there were particular sides to be chosen presented a fundamentally inaccurate duality that obscured understanding of the event and its historical context. Hoig did not assert common cause between and among readers by using "we," "us," "they," or "them" to describe historical actors. Gone were the dehumanizing terms "squaw," "brave," "buck," and "papoose," to describe Native Americans. Instead, he attributed sources by name and described the specific

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personal defense of his subject undermined his scholarship. See Thomas R. Edrington and John Taylor, *The Battle of Glorieta Pass: A Gettysburg in the West, March 26-28, 1862* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 38-39. Jerry D. Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory During the Civil War: Wallen and Evans Inspection Reports, 1862-1863* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 191n19.

context of those actors' words and actions. Hoig named all the principal actors, white and Native, and provided helpful biographical sketches of many of them in richly detailed footnotes. Dissenters Silas Soule and James Beckwourth appeared as important figures.<sup>92</sup> Hoig's tone was familiar at times, however, and key figures were often referred to as as "Old Jim Beckwith" and "Si Soule," rather than by their full names.<sup>93</sup>

Critically, Hoig invoked the testimony and writings of George Bent as Grinnell had half a century earlier. Bent had written and publicized his accounts of Sand Creek in part to counter the narrative of Civil War veneration that veterans of the Colorado First and Third cavalry regiments had used to memorialize Sand Creek at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>94</sup> Hoig's work continued those challenges to earlier heroic portrayals of the military actions in the nineteenth century West as new historical methods and centennial commemorations drew those actions into sharp focus. This increased focus on Native American history as well as contemporary issues in the 1960s helped lead to the publication of a biography of George Bent, written by the historian George Hyde and sourced from his personal correspondence. This crucial Native-centered history was published in 1968, just over a century after Sand Creek.<sup>95</sup> Historians in the years since the publication of Hoig's account have continued to challenge the often deliberately polemic

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<sup>92</sup> Hoig's work was crucial in establishing Soule's place not only as the central dissenter at Sand Creek, but also as an active abolitionist and Jayhawker. He also devoted much-needed attention to the life of Black Kettle and other Cheyenne peace chiefs. See Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961); Hoig, "Silas S. Soule: Partizan of the Frontier." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 26, No. 1. (Winter, 1976): 70-77; and Hoig *The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

<sup>93</sup> Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, 138, 156. James Pierson Beckwourth was born a slave in Virginia in 1798, and had been owned by a man named Jennings Beckworth. He began spelling his name "Beckwourth" as a young man, but historians and other writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often spelled his name "Beckwith."

<sup>94</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 94.

<sup>95</sup> George E. Hyde, *Life of George Bent: Written from His Letters*, ed. Savoie Lottinville (Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1968).

impositions of oversimplified binaries when writing about the idea of Sand Creek.<sup>96</sup> In the mid-twentieth century, however, fictional accounts would begin to exert a powerful capacity to shape ideas about Sand Creek and the transnational cultural encounter of the West in ways that had the potential to outstrip the influence of even the best scholarly works of non-fiction.

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<sup>96</sup> Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 269-316. Jerome A. Greene and Douglas D. Scott, *Finding Sand Creek: History, Archaeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004) 22-25. Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 33-43.

## Chapter Two: The Idea of Sand Creek in Fiction during the Critical Period 1945-1970

Well before the emergence of social history and the transformation of attitudes about Native Americans in the 1950s and 1960s, early Western films revealed ideas about Indian-white violence harnessed by later works of fiction that sought to explain what Sand Creek was all about. Competing schools of thought regarding Sand Creek had emerged in late nineteenth century non-fiction, and twentieth century filmmakers would also deploy similar competing stereotypes about Native Americans. Non-fiction writing about the West had, for some time before the earliest Westerns were produced engaged the noble savage and brute savage stereotypes. Not surprisingly, then, films depicting Native Americans would also engage those stereotypes. While not explicitly or even implicitly about Sand Creek, D.W. Griffith's 1912 two-reel Western *The Massacre* introduced film audiences to some of these themes. Thomas Ince's *Indian Massacre*, produced the same year, had also portrayed a pair of massacres. Ince used extensive location shooting to endow his films with immense, sweeping landscapes. Ince's Westerns frequently presented humans as finite beings struggling against the natural world evoked by those landscapes. Indians in his films appeared as part of that natural world.<sup>97</sup> In Ince's film, a white hunter kills a pair of buffalo. This prompts a massacre of whites by Indians, followed by a reciprocal massacre of Indians by whites. Indians, closer to nature than whites, kill a human being in nature's defense. The white men see this as unwarranted provocation, and act to control nature through violence.

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<sup>97</sup> Brian Taves, *Thomas Ince: Hollywood's Independent Pioneer* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 37.

Griffith's conspicuously bleak film reversed this order, portraying first an ostensibly unprovoked attack by white cavalrymen on a peaceful Indian camp. Close-ups of Indian characters, including a woman holding a baby, precede the attack, endowing these characters with a degree of humanity. The cavalry charge itself, as in the later retaliatory Indian attack, is shot with deep staging and focus to capture action in the foreground, middle-ground, and background. Critical moments of action are then interspersed with close-ups that provide humanizing details. These elements encourage sympathy for the Indian characters and their subsequent pursuit of vengeance. This pursuit culminates in an Indian ambush of a white convoy through Indian country that carries a woman and her baby who are under the protection of the absent protagonist. There is nowhere for the convoy's defenders to take cover, and they form a circle of defense that slowly shrinks as the defenders fall. As the protagonist arrives, he at first sees only a pile of corpses. Believing the woman and her child dead, he puts a gun to his own head before a companion pushes it away. Finally, the woman's hand pushes out through the pile of bodies. She has survived thanks to the bravery of the men who surrounded her.

But those men fell for a reason. The massacre of whites by Indians in Griffith's film was not unprovoked, as was the case in Ince's film. Here Indian brutality was a direct response to white brutality. All the non-fiction accounts I have examined made some mention of Native pursuits of vengeance for Sand Creek, even those that claimed that Sand Creek had pacified the Plains and made the people of Denver safe. So although *The Massacre* was not an explicit retelling of Sand Creek, its story of Indian violence as

the tragic but understandable consequence of white violence both linked it with earlier non-fictional works and foreshadowed later fictional works.

*The Massacre* would not be released until 1914, possibly due to Biograph management's reluctance to release such a dark and violent picture, and so would not compete directly with Ince's film.<sup>98</sup> Griffith's disputes with Biograph continued, and he left the company before *The Massacre* was released when executives rebuffed his efforts to create even longer films.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, Griffith's film would be an important early example of a fictional representation of the West that suggested that wanton white violence in the name of conquest provoked justified retributive campaigns by Native Americans, that put "innocent" whites in increased danger.

#### **"It is well to see the other side of the picture"**

The memory of Sand Creek lingered as Denver grew from a nineteenth-century mining boomtown to the major city it was becoming in the mid-twentieth century. In 1947, Hollywood producer John Haggott wanted to make a movie about Sand Creek. He learned about the massacre from the people around him growing up in Colorado, particularly from his father, a Central City mine engineer who described the event as "disgraceful."<sup>100</sup> His studio had assigned him the title "The Prince of Stallions,"

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<sup>98</sup> Scott Simmon, "The Massacre," in *The Griffith Project: Volume 6, Films Produced in 1912*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai (London: The British Film Institute, 2002), 86-90.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975, 1994), 40.

<sup>100</sup> Frank Dougherty, "Turning the Tables on an Old Formula: Indians Will Be the Victims of White Man's Cruelty in Projected Columbia Film," *New York Times*, September 14, 1947, X4. "Ideas and Comments," *Rocky Mountain Herald*, Oct 4, 1947, 1.

apparently allowing him free rein with all other aspects of the production, including story, setting, and cast.

Haggott had read an old newspaper article about a military officer who was attacked in Denver for denouncing Chivington's actions at Sand Creek. Such an officer, "imbued with the ideal of the brotherhood of man," as Haggott told the *New York Times*, could serve as an excellent Western hero.<sup>101</sup> Haggott worked with Pulitzer Prize-winning author H.L. Davis on the script until Davis left to finish another job. Although Haggott's project apparently died in development, it revealed what stories were important to Coloradans like Haggott. The fact that it was attempted in 1947, by a producer who grew up in Colorado, also reveals a great deal about how national and international politics were taking shape.

At the outset of the Cold War, Americans were deeply concerned with representing the United States as a force of moral good, in contrast with the Soviet Union and its international sphere of influence. American films reflected this concern, and the Western presented filmmakers with a particularly malleable and adaptable platform upon which they could construct morality tales. In Western films of the early Cold War, wrongs could be righted, and injustices answered for. Tolerance could solve racial problems – as long as a white hero led the way and Indians assimilated into white society.<sup>102</sup> In the Western, individual European-American heroes could defend weak and marginalized groups against an immoral and violent state authority.

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<sup>101</sup> Dougherty, "Turning the Tables on an Old Formula."

<sup>102</sup> Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 81, 90.

Responses to this film proposal about a major local injustice helped reveal how Sand Creek endured in the memory of Coloradans eighty-three years after the event. Announcements of the prospective film in the *New York Times* and the small weekly *Rocky Mountain Herald* prompted Vassar College historian Kenneth W. Porter to write to the *Herald* to offer a scholarly interpretation of Sand Creek. In his article, Porter emphasized the role of Silas Soule. “If John Haggott is looking for a hero in the affair,” Porter wrote, “how about selecting an officer who was present and refused to participate instead of one who merely ‘thanked God’ he was absent?”<sup>103</sup> Porter then provided a brief biographical sketch of Soule, noting that his family was so intensely devoted to the abolitionist cause that Silas’ older brother was named after the radical anti-slavery publisher William Lloyd Garrison. Additionally, the Soules had moved from Maine into the West in order to aid in the resistance to the pro-slavery Quantrill raids in Kansas. Porter also noted Soule’s prior willingness to put himself at real risk by organizing and participating in jailbreaks for abolitionists imprisoned by pro-slavery forces, and by assisting Underground Railroad operatives.

The *Rocky Mountain News*, one of Denver’s two major daily papers, announced Haggott’s film project with a brief notice placed beside announcements of a starlet’s recent engagement and a local March of Dimes meeting.<sup>104</sup> This provoked *Rocky* columnist Lee Casey to respond a few days later that it was about time Sand Creek became the subject of a feature film. Casey’s article, however, dripped with skepticism about the prospective film’s intended historical accuracy and regarding Hollywood’s very ability to complete such a project. “The picture will be authentic (I seem to have heard

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<sup>103</sup> Kenneth W. Porter, “A Note on Sand Creek,” *Rocky Mountain Herald*, November 15, 1947, 1.

<sup>104</sup> “Denver Producer To Film Story Of Sand Creek,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 8, 1947, 16.

that one before) and will be a definite contribution to popular knowledge of the struggle that developed this section of the nation,” Casey wrote. “Well, maybe.”<sup>105</sup> Casey reported that the project’s working title had been changed from “The King of the Stallions” to “Sand Creek,” although that title would probably be changed again. According to Casey’s article and the *Herald* pieces, Haggott had been traveling to reservations to cast the Indian roles, a remarkable step in 1947.<sup>106</sup>

Casey’s article indicated that there were indeed Coloradans who viewed Chivington’s actions as shameful, regardless of their context. It also revealed criticism of the film industry’s often seriously misleading fictional version of the West. “If the movies really do a good job at Sand Creek, however, they will achieve the useful purpose of showing that the hearty pioneers were not all sentimental romanticists,” Casey wrote. “Fictioneers and historical writers have emphasized the atrocities perpetrated by Indians who were deprived of their lands. It is well to see the other side of the picture.”<sup>107</sup> While Porter had recommended Silas Soule as protagonist, Casey suggested that Major Scott Anthony could serve as a potential hero in Haggott’s movie because of his testimony at the Congressional inquiry into Chivington’s actions at Sand Creek. Anthony seemed a strange choice for a Hollywood hero, since although he did testify to some of the important details of the massacre, Department of the Missouri commander Major General Samuel R. Curtis had placed Anthony in command of Fort Lyon in part because of his

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<sup>105</sup> Lee Casey, “Movies Defer Colorado Invasion,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 16, 1947, 29.

<sup>106</sup> That same year, a group of Native American actors in Hollywood led by Will Rogers founded the American Indian Citizens League, in part to push for better representation of Native Americans in film. See *Variety*, March 12, 1947, 2. The powerful hold that Indian stereotypes had on show business can be seen in this article, which mixes “Varietyese” slang with references to scalping “palefaces.” At least a few people working in Hollywood recognized that dehumanized fictional representations of native peoples were shameful, and needed to be addressed through direct involvement of real-life Native Americans in filmmaking.

<sup>107</sup> Casey, “Movies Defer Colorado Invasion.”

less conciliatory stance (in comparison with his predecessor Edward Wynkoop) toward the Plains Indians. Anthony had also fully complied with Chivington's order to attack Sand Creek, again straining the characterization of the Western hero. Although Casey asserted that "[it] ought to be a good picture if Hollywood doesn't mess it up too much," ultimately, he appeared skeptical that the picture Haggott described would be made at all.

Casey's article prompted a response from novelist Dorothy Gardiner, who was working on a book about Sand Creek at the time. While Gardiner agreed with Casey that the event was a massacre and needed to be memorialized as such, she disagreed strongly with the idea of using Anthony as the proposed hero of any dramatization. Anthony, Gardiner claimed, was no better than Chivington, and lost his command following the Congressional hearing. "If you want a hero for Sand Creek," Gardiner wrote, "try Silas Soule, who gave the most damaging testimony against Chivington, who was murdered on the streets of Denver, and whose character was assailed by Chivington after his death."<sup>108</sup> Gardiner also proposed Major Edward Wynkoop, whose resistance to Chivington had led the colonel to replace him as the militia marched toward Sand Creek. Wynkoop could serve as a suitable hero in a faithful retelling of the story, Gardiner argued, because he appeared to have at least acted in good faith with Black Kettle and was criticized by Denverites – including in the pages of the *Rocky* – for his actions. Gardiner based her claims on a careful reading of military and Congressional records, as well as contemporaneous newspaper articles.

By examining these sources within the larger context of Indian removal policy and electoral politics of the new settlements of the West during the mid-nineteenth

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<sup>108</sup> Dorothy Gardiner, "Sand Creek – a Massacre," *Rocky Mountain News*, November 1, 1947.

century, Gardiner concisely developed several ideas that helped approximate the scholarly consensus developing at the time: that Sand Creek was a massacre, not a battle; that Chivington was the lead actor in the atrocities that occurred; that Wynkoop and especially Soule directly resisted the atrocities led by Chivington; that Chivington's deployment of troops in a half-circle resulted in crossfire and greater casualties among his soldiers; and that Chivington's damaged reputation (but not prosecution) following the hearings had put an end to his political ambitions, but not to the intense feeling among his defenders that he had been unfairly smeared after defending Colorado's Eastern Plains from a real existential threat.

Gardiner's 1949 novel *The Great Betrayal* would use historical fiction to examine the idea of Sand Creek in ways that non-fiction accounts could not. Non-fiction accounts can be hampered when extant source material is limited or compromised. Gardiner relied heavily on official testimonies and personal correspondences to frame the narrative and to provide some dialogue for the historical characters. She then used fictional characters to fill the gaps in the historical record, to suggest the essence of private conversations that were never recorded, and present the thoughts and motivations of the historical characters as she understood them. Gardiner used terms like "redskins," "squaws," and "half-breeds," but assigned them to the characters' thoughts and spoken words. Providing Chivington's dialogue, Gardiner also used carefully selected language to illustrate the commander's bloodlust and his contempt for those that would question him:

[Chivington] paused for breath, murdering them all with his eyes. 'I'm for killing redskins, and any man who won't follow me is a damned yellow-bellied coward!' For a follower of Christ, a preacher of the Word of God, Colonel Chivington was surprisingly supple in his use of profanity.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Dorothy Gardiner, *The Great Betrayal* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1949), 135.

Describing Sand Creek witness Jim Smith's first sighting of Chivington's approach to the camp, for example, Gardiner intimates Smith's thoughts:

He ran toward them, waving his arms and calling out that these Indians were peaceful—and stopped, gasping with horror. These men he knew! There was Anthony Red-Eye and soldiers in dark blue—Chivington's damned hundred-day outfit. Chivington, who hated redskins and half-breeds and white men who lived with the Indians...<sup>110</sup>

Gardiner's decision to title the chapter on the massacre "The Battle" may seem strange, but she was clearly ascribing the use of that term to her novel's characters. Her use of the term was conceptually, if not literally, in quotation marks. Gardiner thereby used nineteenth-century language to direct twentieth-century readers' attention to those terms' dehumanizing effects.

Gardiner's representation of Sand Creek and its meaning shed light on a few people who had been under-represented in earlier non-fiction accounts, despite the availability of documentary evidence. The author presented the march to Sand Creek largely from the perspective of the African-American mountain man and guide Jim Beckwourth. Much of the attack itself was constructed around the experiences of Jim Smith, a white guide and Cheyenne translator whose son was killed by soldiers shortly after the initial charge. Lieutenant Joseph Cramer, a white dissenter from the Colorado First, also received attention as Gardiner described his refusal to order his men to attack the Indian camp. Major Edward Wynkoop also appeared as resistant to Chivington's belligerence. Most notably, Gardiner's novel paid particular consideration to the experiences and attitudes of the chief white dissenter of Sand Creek, Captain Silas Soule. Gardiner detailed Soule's participation in the Camp Weld conference, his seething

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<sup>110</sup> Gardiner, *The Great Betrayal*, 151.

defiance of Chivington at Sand Creek, and his murder by a Chivington supporter on the streets of Denver less than a year later. Gardiner's novel represented well the voices of guides and soldiers who were skeptical of Chivington's crusade against Native Americans.

But in *The Great Betrayal*, as in subsequent film representations of Sand Creek, Native American perspectives were missing. Black Kettle and the other principal chiefs appeared in Gardiner's novel, particularly in her chapter on the Camp Weld conference, but they were viewed for the most part from the white perspective. Their words were responses to white inquiries, and their bodies became props in a white-centered narrative. Despite *The Great Betrayal's* many strengths – and they were indeed many – its expository power was fundamentally limited by its concomitantly limited scope.

Eight days after Gardiner's letter to the editor appeared in the *Rocky Mountain News*, a Chivington defender responded. On November 9, the *Rocky* ran a guest column by George F. Dunklee, who claimed to have met Chivington, Anthony, and other soldiers who had been at Sand Creek. Dunklee's language quickly revealed his position. Instead of "settlers" or "colonists," Dunklee referred to the non-native people who lived in Colorado Territory in 1864 as "immigrants" and "pioneers." Native Americans, all of them, were "hostile Indians." Dunklee made no distinction between the Indians who conducted raids on overland travelers and those who sought conciliation and cooperation with white authorities – much less between and among Cheyenne, Arapaho, Lakota, or Ute. Just as earlier non-fiction writers like Junius Wharton and Irving Howbert had, Dunklee appealed to the threat that white Coloradans faced in Denver's earliest years. He reminded readers that women and children had hidden in Denver's United States Mint

building for protection during one threatened raid. He noted certain undisputed facts about Chivington – his status as a Methodist minister, his large stature, his apparent personal magnetism, his booming voice and gift for public speaking, and his victory over Confederate forces at Glorieta Pass. These facts certainly made him quite a compelling personality, but had little to do with his actions at Sand Creek. Dunklee had no apparent comment on Silas Soule’s or Edward Wynkoop’s actions during or following the raid.

Dunklee, like every other Chivington defender whom I have identified, insisted that whatever the “Fighting Parson’s” actions were, they resulted in peace and safety for white settlers through subordination of the Plains Indians. “We all know the outcome of the battle,” Dunklee said, clearly not referring to the lessons the Plains Indians learned about attempting to work in good faith with people who considered them more of a pestilence than a culture. “Suffice it to say that there were no more Indian raids that drove women and children into the U.S. Mint in Denver, or murdered boys at Colorado Springs,” he wrote. “The Sand Creek battle stopped that.”<sup>111</sup> For Chivington’s steadfast defenders, Sand Creek remained a battle, and a successful one. Any twentieth-century film representation of the event, they argued, ought to reflect that. That it was a proposed film project that had prompted this public debate showed the power that film can have over both the public imagination and public memory of historic events. Coloradans could agree that any film depiction of Sand Creek needed to “get it right,” despite how divided they may have been over what “getting it right” actually looked like.

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<sup>111</sup> George F. Dunklee, “Honor to the Memory of Colonel Chivington,” *Rocky Mountain News*, November 9, 1947, 29.

## **Sand Creek and the Cold War B-Western**

The 1951 B-Western *Tomahawk* emerged in the wake of *Broken Arrow* as one of a new group of Westerns produced during the second “Red Scare.” In these Westerns, Native Americans were often depicted as sympathetic characters, if not always as full human beings. The overt anti-communist and anti-leftist crusades of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee, as well as the anti-leftist union purges led by Screen Actors Guild President Ronald Reagan and others, forced filmmakers to find new ways to address otherwise dangerous political themes. With the Western, filmmakers could question belligerent military strategies without appearing unpatriotic. They could denounce white racism without offending southern white audiences. They could also criticize American imperialism by placing the action in the past, thus avoiding direct comparisons to contemporaneous events while addressing the same themes.<sup>112</sup>

*Tomahawk* used the idea of Sand Creek to challenge audiences in all of these ways. *Tomahawk* presented a fictionalized version of the 1865 Powder River Expedition, a wide-ranging United States military campaign against the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho in present-day Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Nebraska. The film framed the punitive expedition as a result of the the chaos generated by Sand Creek, although indirectly. In the film, Van Heflin portrayed mountain man Jim Bridger, who served as a guide, translator, and cultural mediator between the army and the “Sioux.” The historical Jim Bridger had indeed spoken numerous Native American and European languages, and had demonstrated an interest in better understanding Indian cultures.

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<sup>112</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 366-368.

Heflin's Bridger encounters the film's villain on the expedition. Played by Alex Nicol, this arrogant lieutenant had served under Chivington at Sand Creek. A singer, played by Yvonne De Carlo, served as a surrogate for the audience as she attempts to learn the truth about the West from Heflin and Nicol. The lieutenant brags to the singer about his participation in the massacre, repeating Chivington's supporters' central claim.

"Chivington really cleaned up that part of the country," the lieutenant brags. "Chivington was quite a man. We had a high time." Later, however, he denies to the fictionalized version of Colonel Henry Carrington that he was ever at Sand Creek. In 1951, actions like those taken by Chivington at Sand Creek and ideas like those espoused later by his supporters had become something shameful. The notion that certain people needed to be exterminated to make way for civilization could be expressed privately, or even publicly among like-minded people. But in public, this notion was shameful.

The fictional Bridger became a better person by becoming part-Indian. The lieutenant scornfully refers to him as a "squaw man," not fully white and not fully civilized. The film depicted Bridger as the wise go-between; he understood the various elements of the cultural encounter well enough to recognize right action in a complicated, chaotic, violent, and continuously changing situation. Since he had "gone Indian," only he could recognize the moral path. Only he could draw the truth from the others he encountered. The film's characterization of Bridger suggested that to become ideal mediators, whites must confront the evil of The Massacre, resist it, and transform oneself and one's society by learning from it.

Film representations of massacres often rely upon white mediators between white and Indian worlds. As Robert Baird has argued, "[the] historical and mythic power of The

Massacre is so pervasive that it seems all Westerns that deal with the confrontation of white and red people must address this issue in some manner.”<sup>113</sup> The fictional Jim Bridger confronted Sand Creek as a moral evil because he had lost loved ones there after forging close, personal relationships with people of a number of different tribes. He was skeptical of the army’s motives in its dealings with the Plains Indians. In reality, the historical Jim Bridger did outlive two Indian wives, but neither died at Sand Creek. There was one man present on the Powder River Expedition who had been at Sand Creek, and even lost close friends there. Jim Beckwourth had spent time with Crow people and interacted with the Cheyenne and others. He was a well-known mountain man and an acquaintance of Bridger.<sup>114</sup> Beckwourth served as a scout and translator – a cultural mediator not unlike Bridger – for a number of years before he joined Chivington’s expedition for that purpose. Beckwourth’s testimony contained a number of critically important details that led to Chivington’s censure by the military commission: that two thirds of the Indians killed at Sand Creek were women and children; that White Antelope attempted to surrender, yelling “Stop! Stop!” in clear English before being shot; and that soldiers shot non-combatant Indians after the “battle” was over.<sup>115</sup>

Beckwourth spent more than fifty years with the native peoples of the Plains before he died from an uncontrollable nosebleed in a Crow village during the 1865

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<sup>113</sup> Robert Baird, “‘Going Indian’: *Dances With Wolves* (1990),” in *Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, eds. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 158.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas D. Bonner, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, and Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians. With Illustrations. Written from His Own Dictation*, ed. Delmont R. Oswald (Originally published 1856; reprint: Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 142-144.

<sup>115</sup> Testimony of James Beckwourth, “The Sand Creek Massacre,” *Report of the Secretary of War, Senate Exec. Doc., No. 26, 39 Cong., 2 Sess.* in *Jim Beckwourth: Black Mountain Man and War Chief of the Crows* by Elinor Wilson (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 176-177.

Powder River Expedition. The *Rocky Mountain News* eulogized him as one of the West's most important figures: "In wild western life and adventure, he was the compeer of the Choteaus, the Bents, the Sarpys, the Vasquez, the Meeks, Bridger, Jack Hays, Kit Carson, Bill Williams, and a host of others who have become famous in their way, and among whom none excelled him in wild and daring adventure, or peculiar characteristics in mode of life."<sup>116</sup> But Beckwourth's absence from *Tomahawk's* narrative likely stems from his own ethnic background. An African American born into slavery would not be able to serve as a suitable intercultural mediator in even the most forward-thinking Hollywood production in the early 1950s. His life was too complicated for a film formula of that time to explain, and African Americans of the West would have to wait for more thorough film representation.

*The Denver Post* critic Harvey Scandrett said that "Old Jim Bridger would admire his own image as reflected by Van Heflin" in *Tomahawk*, but quickly acknowledged the continued presence of Chivington defenders in his review. "Colorado descendants of Chivington's home guardsmen," Scandrett noted, "will hardly be flattered by Bridger-Heflin's description of the group as 'scum,' led by a 'sanctimonious, blood-thirsty, so-called preacher.'"<sup>117</sup> Despite a growing scholarly consensus on Sand Creek as a largely one-sided act of wanton violence in the interest of white conquest, there were still enough people in Colorado who saw it as a necessary and two-sided "battle" for a reviewer to acknowledge them in a review of a film that was only tangentially about Sand Creek. The

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<sup>116</sup> Elinor Wilson, *Jim Beckwourth: Black Mountain Man and War Chief of the Crows* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 181-184. Obituary of James Beckwourth, *Rocky Mountain News*, February 6, 1867, in *Jim Beckwourth: Black Mountain Man and War Chief of the Crows* by Elinor Wilson (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 185.

<sup>117</sup> Harvey Scandrett, "'Tomahawk' Liberally Spiced With Adventure," *The Denver Post*, March 3, 1951.

reviewer did not, however, need to explain to readers of *The Denver Post* who “Chivington” was or what “Sand Creek” was all about. He assumed everyone knew. Scandrett’s review also unwittingly revealed the way that films based on people and events of the past can be confused for accurate secondary documentation of those events. “Bridger can be excused for his heat,” Scandrett suggested, “if it is true that he lost an Indian wife and son in the Chivington raid on the Indian village on Sand Creek.”<sup>118</sup> It was not true. The idea of Bridger as a survivor of the massacre, however, was critical to the plot. As a survivor, albeit by proxy, he had the moral authority not only to condemn the arrogant lieutenant’s past, but also to question the actions of the United States government itself without appearing disloyal.

In the *Rocky Mountain News*, reviewer Frances Melrose opened her review of *Tomahawk* by acknowledging Hollywood’s turn from the Brutal Savage to the Noble Savage stereotype in cinematic representations of Native Americans. “Have you noticed how the Indian’s screen character has changed lately?” Melrose asked, “From a marauding savage swooping down on innocent white settlers, he has become an abused, exploited human being whose rights are being denied by callous whites.”<sup>119</sup> It is difficult to see how a depiction that negates individualism by replacing inevitable disputes and struggles with an imaginary idyll could be regarded as a “human” depiction. Despite this, the emergent Noble Savage archetype indeed embodied an attempt to right a historical wrong by recognizing past dehumanization. This reversal, however, resulted in an overcorrection that retained the semiotics and language of dehumanization, swapping one

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<sup>118</sup> Scandrett, “‘Tomahawk’ Liberally Spiced With Adventure.”

<sup>119</sup> Frances Melrose, “Drama of Indian Wars Is Told in ‘Tomahawk,’” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 3, 1951, 18.

other-than-human stereotype for another. Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* was not particularly impressed with the film, and cited this simple inversion of the cavalry-versus-Indian formula as one of its chief weaknesses.<sup>120</sup> John L. Scott's review in the *Los Angeles Times* was more forgiving, praising Heflin's performance and taking note of *Tomahawk's* place within an emerging subgenre of pro-Indian Westerns that implicitly criticized official government mistreatment of Native Americans.

### **Sand Creek and the War Hero**

*Tomahawk's* plot was not especially focused on confronting Sand Creek directly, but rather on the idea that Americans can and should right historical wrongs. The film reified the Cold War notion that real Americans had long sought to right wrongs and defend the weak against violent, immoral state power. Individuals could do right in difficult times by going against the flow of a mob backed up by overweening state authority. *The Guns of Fort Petticoat* (1957) would develop these themes and provide an explicit film representation of the Sand Creek massacre.

As a Texan fighting for the Union in the Civil War, protagonist Lieutenant Hewitt in *The Guns of Fort Petticoat* had already gone against the majority once. Since Lieutenant Hewitt was played by Audie Murphy – a celebrated World War II veteran who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor – it was clear to audiences who the hero of the story would be. He was a singular, courageous, all-American hero, one who was not hesitant to go against the grain in the interest of morally right action.

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<sup>120</sup> Bosley Crowther, "THE SCREEN IN REVIEW: 'Tomahawk,' Cavalry-and-Indians Film, at Loew's State-'Appointment with Crime' at Bryant," *New York Times*, February 19, 1951, 19.

But he was a peculiar kind of hero. He understood the differences not only among tribes, but also the semi-autonomous groups that followed individual chiefs.

In the film, Hewitt reports the presence of Indians outside their assigned space to his commander, whose subsequent zeal for attacking Indians over the objections of his officers make him a fairly transparent stand-in for John Chivington. The commander disregards Hewitt's assertions that the people he encountered were peaceful and mostly unarmed. He has clearly been looking for an excuse to fight Indians, and the presence of these people has provided him with one. A massacre follows. The film depicts the cavalry as particularly bloodthirsty, striking down women and children and burning tipis. Hewitt is disgusted by what he sees.

Although his actions after the massacre differ substantially, Hewitt evidently stands in for Silas Soule. Hewitt cannot follow the commands of a colonel he saw as both wantonly cruel and tactically tone-deaf. He joined the army to defend the weak against the violence of morally deficient men. Participation in a massacre of non-combatant civilians presented a moral crisis disruptive enough to cause both the real and fictional Silas Soules to disobey orders and refuse to serve their corrupt commanders. The real Soule responded by testifying against his former commander before military tribunals and even before Congress. *Fort Petticoat's* fictional Soule responds by deserting. He flees to his old home in Texas, traveling alone across the Plains into ostensibly Confederate territory while still wearing his Union uniform. He overcomes the initial hostility of the Confederate-sympathizing women there – the men of the town having left to fight in the East – by organizing them in a defense against an approaching threat. The Apaches, an oft-deployed machine of all-purpose menace in Western films, were coming

to destroy the town, possibly in retaliation for Sand Creek.<sup>121</sup> While the Cheyenne who were slaughtered by orders of the Chivington surrogate at the beginning of the film embodied the helpless, doomed Noble Savage, the Apaches provided a threat foreign enough to push the fort defense sequence forward without requiring much explanation to the audience. Leading the fort's defense would provide Hewitt a chance to uphold the values his old colonel had betrayed. But to uphold those values, a white savior was required, and an insidiously gendered manner: even women could defend themselves against the violence of the American West so long as they had a strong, virtuous white man to lead them.

*The Guns of Fort Petticoat* was neither a commercial failure nor a smashing success. It was not a particularly good movie, either. It did not receive a review in the pages of either *The Denver Post* or the *Rocky Mountain News*. *Variety*'s review focused on the training and action sequences, calling the action "fairly entertaining." The review damned the production quality with lukewarm praise, deeming it "adequate," "satisfactory," and "okay."<sup>122</sup> The farcical training sequences and even more farcical climax – in which the women commandeer the corrupt colonel's office at gunpoint – seemed jarring and out of place for a film that opened with the horrors of the Sand Creek massacre. Still, the fact that it depicted the massacre at all demonstrated how attitudes toward the violence inherent to the settlement of the West were changing. The cavalry of *Fort Petticoat* killed wantonly, and the film's hero rejected the actions of his commander and even the army itself. The good individual could defend the weak by rejecting state-sanctioned mob violence.

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<sup>121</sup> The Apache sometimes instead served the Noble Savage archetype better, as in *Broken Arrow*.

<sup>122</sup> Review of *The Guns of Fort Petticoat*, *Variety*, March 13, 1957, 6.

Despite its bizarre plot and uneven execution, *The Guns of Fort Petticoat* presented another important trope incubated in the paranoid atmosphere of 1950s Hollywood. The film presented two sets of “Savages”: the Noble Savages represented by the Cheyenne massacre victims, and the Brutal Savages represented by the Apache attackers. This representation, as Baird argues in his analysis of later Westerns that used this formula, “has the function of addressing white historical fear and guilt within the same narrative, providing a way in which a fiction can remain simultaneously true to contradictory emotional responses to history.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, filmmakers could use Sand Creek as a heuristic tool to explore conflicting attitudes Americans held toward imperialism and racism by placing the story safely in the past. But such an approach, useful as it may have been to document changing attitudes by attempting to atone for past belligerence, essentially removed the actual casualties of that belligerence by sidelining their stories or eliminating them entirely. Denverites went to see these movies – especially *Tomahawk*, which topped the Denver box office during its opening week – but their understanding of Sand Creek would not be improved by viewing these films.<sup>124</sup>

### **Sand Creek and the Classical Hero**

Michael Straight’s 1963 novel *A Very Small Remnant* presented a fictional version of Sand Creek as narrated by Major Edward Wynkoop. Straight’s novel imagined Wynkoop as a tragic figure, but not because he was a good man who did right and

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<sup>123</sup> Baird, “Going Indian,” 160. The later films Baird examines are *Little Big Man* (1970) and *Dances with Wolves* (1990).

<sup>124</sup> “Tomahawk’ Wow \$25,500 Denver,” *Variety*, March 7, 1951, 8. *Tomahawk* was also tops in Portland, Oregon and in Indianapolis, Indiana, where audiences flocked to it despite the state high school basketball championships airing on television that weekend.

resisted a great wrong. That honor would go to *Remnant's* Silas Soule. Straight's version of Soule stood up for his beliefs even under great pressure from authority. Soule unflinchingly risked his very life to resist a powerful genocidal madman, ultimately sacrificing his life.

This notion of an unflinching ideological martyr in a world in crisis was certainly influenced by Straight's own life. The son of the co-founders of *The New Republic*, the radical Straight attended the London School of Economics in the mid-1930s. He joined the Communist Party while a student at Cambridge, deeply concerned with the rise of fascism in continental Europe. He later served as a Soviet spy both in Britain and the United States, although by his account a reluctant one. A recent biography of Straight argued that his "research" trips to Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska while writing *A Very Small Remnant* and his first novel *Carrington* were covers for espionage operations.<sup>125</sup>

By contrast, Straight's Wynkoop was an ordinary man of his time who reluctantly participated in and even facilitated that great wrong, but came to this realization only too late. He continued in his later life to agonize over his role in a gruesome atrocity. This fictional version of Wynkoop credited Soule with enabling later generations to view Sand Creek as both tragic and avoidable. Soule martyred himself, thereby permanently and indelibly marking the memory of Sand Creek with his blood. "We were threatened by Chivington—I am certain of that," wrote the fictional Wynkoop. "The threat was overcome because a brave man [Soule] held his own life cheap."<sup>126</sup> Straight's literary

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<sup>125</sup> Roland Perry, *Last of the Cold War Spies: The Life of Michael Straight, the Only American in Britain's Cambridge Spy Ring* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2005), 269-285.

<sup>126</sup> Michael Straight, *A Very Small Remnant* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 231.

construction of Wynkoop served as compelling literature and the character himself as an excellent classical hero.<sup>127</sup> This construction, however, was critically limited in its representation of Sand Creek and what it meant to people who remembered it in the twentieth century.

Like the film representations, *A Very Small Remnant* still centered on the white experience at Sand Creek, in particular that of Wynkoop. Its rich, evocative prose and lively dialog still foregrounded the soldiers' perspectives and marginalized the Native ones. Despite Straight's correspondence with Hoig about Sand Creek and what it meant, *Remnant's* narrative still engaged the pro-Chivington/anti-Chivington binary that Hoig's scholarly account had previously proven to be inadequate. The Sand Creek massacre of Straight's novel occurred because of Chivington's personal and singular ambition, racism, arrogance, and brutality, and because of Wynkoop's inability to resist Chivington even as Wynkoop's view of Native Americans evolved through the course of the story.<sup>128</sup> As in earlier non-fiction accounts of Sand Creek, this approach decontextualized the event by isolating Chivington's actions from the larger national extermination and removal policy of which they were a part. Straight wrote in his 1983 memoir that he intended his novel to be "a hymn of praise to the essential goodness of most Americans."<sup>129</sup> *A Very Small Remnant* was an excellent novel, but it was essentially limited as a thorough literary reproduction of Sand Creek's memory.

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<sup>127</sup> Don Graham, "Tragedy and Western American Literature: The Example of Michael Straight's *A Very Small Remnant*," in *Critical Essays on the Western American Novel*, ed. William T. Pilkington (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1980), 187-191.

<sup>128</sup> Straight, *A Very Small Remnant*, 109-110.

<sup>129</sup> Michael Straight, *After Long Silence* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 300.

## The 1970 Revision of Sand Creek

As the first chapter of this study indicates, a shift took place in the way that historians understood and studied American history during the late 1950s and 1960s. In part fueled in the United States by increased access to postsecondary and postgraduate education provided by the G.I. Bill, a new generation of historians, less interested in the limited historical context afforded by the examination of the lives of powerful elites, instead investigated and analyzed the lives of ordinary people. As discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, these historians focused more on structures and processes rather than personalities and events. As a result, the scholarly consensus turned more firmly toward viewing Sand Creek as a massacre and not a battle.<sup>130</sup>

At the same time, American attitudes toward sex and its representation in popular media were changing, and sex was more visible in film as well as in American culture more broadly, particularly after 1968.<sup>131</sup> Levels of profanity and violence in film and other media also increased profoundly at this time, as Hollywood's old system of self-censorship under the Hays Code was scrapped in favor of a new ratings system. This allowed a greater degree of creative freedom for filmmakers such as Sam Peckinpah and Ralph Nelson, who aimed at an audience old enough to be receptive to adult themes but

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<sup>130</sup> As discussed earlier in this study, the turn to social history in Sand Creek historiography can be seen succinctly in the comparison of Reginald S. Craig's *The Fighting Parson* and Stan Hoig's *The Sand Creek Massacre*. In Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace's 1970 volume *American Violence: A Documentary History*, the authors reflected the consensus by identifying Sand Creek as "one of the bloodiest and most disgraceful episodes in the American Indian wars." (273)

<sup>131</sup> In "Illegitimacy, Postwar Psychology, and the Reperiodization of the Sexualization," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (2004), Alan Petigny has argued that by examining rates of unmarried birth rates, a noticeable increase in premarital sex took place during the 1940s and continued through the following decades, asserting "the sexualization of the popular culture did not anticipate the liberalization of mass behavior." For the increase in sexual content in American popular media in 1968, see Eric Schaefer, "Sex Seen: 1968 and the Rise of 'Public' Sex," introduction to *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution*, ed. Eric Schaefer (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014), especially 7-13.

still young enough to spend a substantial amount of time at the movies. An immense audience appeared at just the right time, as the massive generation of Americans born in the years immediately following the Second World War – the “Baby Boomers” – reached that age in the late 1960s.<sup>132</sup> In 1970, Ralph Nelson released *Soldier Blue* into this particular combination of cultural and political contingencies.

*Soldier Blue* was easily the most graphically violent visual representation of Sand Creek. Nelson wasted little time in indicating his intentions to grab the audience by the shirt collar and deal in difficult truths. Fully cognizant of the cultural and political context in which his film would appear, Nelson and screenwriter John Gay begin with an unambiguous statement of purpose in an introductory title card:

In 5,000 years of recorded civilization mankind has written his history in blood. Mankind's noblest achievements reveal a divine spark. But there is a dark side to man's soul that has festered since Cain slew his brother. The climax of *Soldier Blue* shows specifically and graphically the horrors of battle as bloodlust overcomes reason. Brutal atrocities affect not only the warriors. But the innocent as well... the women and children. The greatest horror of all is that it is true.

*Soldier Blue* was not by any means an accurate depiction of the historical facts of Sand Creek. It was a fiction rife with deliberately anachronistic language, and an out-of-place love story. Even the film's star later noted that it was a film “whose heart, if nothing else, was in the right place.”<sup>133</sup> The facts of November 29, 1864 were less important to the story than the filmmakers' interpretation of the larger truth as they saw it, a truth that indicted repressive power structures, genocidal attacks on culture, and the brutal violence that had accompanied the American push westward.

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<sup>132</sup> Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998), 12-15.

<sup>133</sup> Candice Bergen, *Knock Wood* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 225.

As the title card fades out, we see a cavalry unit rolling through Wyoming. A team of horses pulls a wagon that carries mail, military payroll, and a woman whose hat obscures her face. One of the men makes lascivious comments about the woman, irritating fresh-faced Private Honus Gant. The paymaster pulls rank on the cavalry commander, demanding flankers be sent out to watch for an ambush. Then a bullet graphically rips through the face of Honus' companion in slow motion. This begins the film's first massacre scene. The woman remains calm. A seasoned veteran of frontier violence, she camouflages herself and retreats up a nearby hill as all hell breaks loose below. Honus joins her, horrified at both the carnage he sees and the woman's blasé attitude about it all. She identifies herself as Cresta Lee, and says she has lived as Cheyenne Chief Spotted Wolf's wife for the past two years.<sup>134</sup> She is immediately sympathetic to the cause of the native peoples. Her attitude toward the motives and actions of the cavalry ranges between strong skepticism and full opposition, even as her recent engagement to a cavalry officer at a remote outpost explains her presence on this ill-fated convoy. It was clear from the moment she spoke that she was a surrogate for the young, mostly white, educated, liberal audience that was *Soldier Blue's* target audience.

Cresta scolds Honus for not taking Indian losses or white atrocities into account. They travel to the fort together, narrowly escaping a menacing trader who carries rifles to sell to Indians. Again Cresta sympathizes with the Indians, asserting their right to self-defense. Honus fulfills what he sees as his duty as a soldier and burns the trader's wagon, destroying the rifles intended for his "enemy." When the trader shoots Honus in the leg,

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<sup>134</sup> This appears to be a fully fictional "Chief Spotted Wolf," not necessarily a fictionalized version of the Northern Cheyenne chief who fought alongside Lakota Chief Crazy Horse against Generals George Crook and George Armstrong Custer in 1876.

she hides him and heals him using what she calls “big injun medicine.” Like *Tomahawk*’s Jim Bridger, Cresta was a mediator who had gained special power by “becoming Indian.” Cresta reaches the fort – which is really more of a bivouac – but the colonel there refuses to send help to bring him in. The colonel stands in for both the historic John Chivington and the authority of the 1960s “establishment.” He seems astonished that she would expect help to be sent for one man. In an unconcealed reference to the clichéd complaint of 1960s conservatives, he says, “When I see young people today behaving like that I just... I just can’t help wondering what this goddamn country’s coming to.” This assertion, intended as a sly cultural reference and a wink to the audience, confuses the plot. Why would an aggressive, bloodthirsty cavalry commander so vociferously object to attempts to bring him another soldier to fight in defense of his vulnerable, remote fort? Cresta leaves her soldier fiancé when he refuses to help her rescue Honus. She returns to Spotted Wolf, who is apparently camped so near the soldiers as to make Cresta’s journey quite brief. She changes into Indian clothing, joyously returning to her Indian friends. She has become a real American by going Indian.

The entire film to this point was prologue to the climactic finale, an explicit reproduction of Sand Creek. Honus returns to the camp and informs the colonel that he has destroyed the rifles that the Cheyenne were expecting. Spotted Wolf tries to convince both the colonel and the more warlike Cheyenne that peace is possible and desirable. Spotted Wolf at this point represents a fictional version of Black Kettle, appearing before the colonel carrying a U.S. flag and a flag of truce. But the colonel orders an attack anyway. The colonel delivers a rousing speech, echoing that of the real Colonel Chivington. At this point, the film conflates Black Kettle’s people and the Dog Soldiers,

as a few of the Cheyennes charge and fight the cavalry. The cavalry charge on a group of huddled women and children, but Honus intervenes, shouting, “No! No! There’s a white woman in there!” The soldiers pull Cresta away and kill the rest of her companions. The soldiers are well-dressed and well-equipped, and, unlike the real soldiers of Sand Creek, appear fairly well-trained and disciplined. The cavalry’s horses trample Spotted Wolf’s U.S. flag – a shocking image for American audiences. The colonel orders total destruction, and graphic scenes of rape, gore, and dismemberment follow in a manner that Roger Greenspun of the *New York Times* said should inspire some admiration for the film’s special effects department.<sup>135</sup> A child’s head explodes in a close-up shot. Spotted Wolf is decapitated with his own knife. A fleeing, screaming woman is tackled and stripped by four laughing cavalymen. Another woman’s breast is cut off. The special effects were so realistic that Nelson decided to leave many graphic dismemberment effects out as they were too disturbing even for him.<sup>136</sup>

Such horrifying scenes in a Hollywood production were a very recent development. As Hollywood filmmakers realized they could not keep up with the growing pornography industry, some turned to graphic depictions of bloody violence to attract audiences. That said, it was possible that bloody photojournalism and television coverage of the war in Vietnam, and of the 1968 Tet Offensive in particular, had desensitized enough Americans to violence in visual media that these graphically violent

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<sup>135</sup> Roger Greenspun, “The Screen: ‘Soldier Blue’ Arrives: Candice Bergen Stars in Violent Western,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1970.

<sup>136</sup> P.B. Hurst, *The Most Savage Film: Soldier Blue, Cinematic Violence, and the Horrors of War* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2008), 137-143. Early cuts of the film included more explicit rapes, babies being thrown into fires, and a soldier beating a baby’s brains out with his rifle butt.

films did not stir up the outrage that would have been likely a few years prior.<sup>137</sup> Coverage of the My Lai massacre and details exposed by Lieutenant William Calley's court martial strongly suggested that massacres of civilians and non-combatants were not just an unfortunate wartime inevitability, but might also represent a historical pattern within American imperial encounters. During the 1950s, filmmakers had begun to suggest that the presence of white settlers and the cavalry sent to protect them might not always have been good, although they had been chastened by the fear of Red Scare blacklisting and Hays Code censorship. By 1970, as Angela Aleiss argues, "the Westerns' mythical heroes faded into the past as America's fertile frontier became a wasteland of mass Indian graves."<sup>138</sup> Although properly critical of the good guy/bad guy duality presented by earlier Westerns, *Soldier Blue* and other revisionist Westerns of the same period failed to entirely discard the duality. Instead, they simply reversed it, drawing attention to its inherent mischaracterizations without robbing the duality of its narrative power.

The makers of the revisionist westerns of the 1960s and 1970s sought to "set the record straight" about the American West of the nineteenth century. They correctly observed the open, nonchalant racism of earlier Westerns as dehumanizing to Native Americans. The changing attitudes towards race, class, and gender among both historians and the general public drove filmmakers like Ralph Nelson to directly confront what they saw as a major structure of social injustice, of which Hollywood had been a key component. The writers, directors, and actors who together authored provocative films

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<sup>137</sup> James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 110-117.

<sup>138</sup> Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian*, 128.

like *Soldier Blue* sought to take direct action, challenging political and cultural attitudes by placing recent events into historical context.

The politics of the authors of *Soldier Blue* clearly influenced the film's themes and characterizations. Nelson and Gay both opposed the military imperialism represented by the Vietnam War.<sup>139</sup> Lead actress Candice Bergen's very involvement in the film was an overt political statement. *Soldier Blue* was an early role for Bergen, but she had seen a sufficient degree of professional success to provide her some capacity to choose her film roles. She had appeared in several commercially or critically successful films in lead or principal supporting roles, and had been nominated for a Golden Globe Award for her role in *The Sand Pebbles* (1966), a film that was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture that year. At the same time, Bergen had become publicly involved in radical politics, associating with the Black Panthers and vocally opposing the United States' escalating military involvement in Vietnam.<sup>140</sup> *Soldier Blue*, whose title Bergen herself suggested to Nelson, drew Bergen in because of the powerful central female lead role she would play and because of the film's anti-imperialist and pro-Indian politics. "I was choosing the best of what was available to me," Bergen wrote in a 1984 memoir, "and any qualms I had about inferior or tasteless scripts were temporarily assuaged by lucrative salaries. Feminism was only just beginning to take root and consciousness-raising was still a thing of the future; when it came to roles for women in films, there weren't many that were much better than the ones offered me."<sup>141</sup> Under these circumstances, Bergen found *Soldier Blue*'s radical potential irresistible.

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<sup>139</sup> Hurst, *The Most Savage Film*, 124-126.

<sup>140</sup> Hurst, *The Most Savage Film*, 84-89.

<sup>141</sup> Bergen, *Knock Wood*, 224-225.

Cleansing Hollywood's long legacy of callous mercenary dehumanization was impossible, but films like *Soldier Blue*, filmmakers reasoned, could be used as a radical force for social justice and improvement of the human condition. Nelson, for example, attempted to use explicit violence of *Soldier Blue* to change attitudes about violence itself, from the heroic, macho violence of *The Wild Bunch* to the deliberately sickening violence of *Soldier Blue*'s final massacre scene.<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately, while seeking to counteract the Brutal Savage stereotype of Native Americans, makers of revisionist Westerns overcorrected in various ways. Some resurrected and reinforced the Noble Savage stereotype, wherein native peoples lived in perfect and harmony with nature and with each other before the arrival of colonizers. Others, like *Soldier Blue*, backfired by rendering Indians all but irrelevant as individuals. Ultimately, *Soldier Blue* was a movie by, for, and about white liberals. In his review of the film, Gregg Kilday of *The Harvard Crimson* called attention to the lack of Indian actors playing Indian roles, arguing that "if Nelson were so godalmighty concerned about the Indian's plight, he might have tried to make as many opportunities available to Indians actors as possible. Seemingly, though, liberalism doesn't begin at home."<sup>143</sup> The critic Roger Ebert observed that "although [*Soldier Blue*] is pro-Indian, it is also white chauvinist. Like *A Man Called Horse*, another so-called pro-Indian film, it doesn't have the courage to be about real Indians.

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<sup>142</sup> Hurst, *The Most Savage Film*, 38.

<sup>143</sup> Gregg J. Kilday, "Cowboys and Vietnamese," *The Harvard Crimson*, January 29, 1971, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1971/1/29/filmscowboys-and-vietnamese-premember-when-indians/> accessed March 30, 2015. Kilday incorrectly assumed that the actor who played Spotted Wolf was "a muscle-bound Mediterranean with an obviously Italian name." Although he certainly had a muscular physique, actor Jorge Pous Rosas (who used the stage name Jorge Rivero in *Soldier Blue*) was a native of Mexico, where the film was shot. Hurst notes that Rivero was cast in part because the Mexican government required locals to be hired in international films shot there. Hurst asserts that "Rivero hadn't been hired for his acting ability or for his English, since he spoke not a word. He had been hired for his stunning looks and a Mr. Universe-like body" (Hurst, *The Most Savage Film*, 97).

The hero in these films somehow has a way of turning out to be white.”<sup>144</sup> In this and other movies intended to highlight the mistreatment of Native Americans, those Native Americans’ stories were oddly sidelined.

Unlike the fictionalized Cheyenne in *Little Big Man*, another revisionist Western made by filmmakers interested in presenting a more historically accurate portrayal of the nineteenth-century West, *Soldier Blue*’s Indians are anonymous. This not only dehumanizes their real-life counterparts but renders the film less effective as a means of provoking political or social dialogue – about American imperialism, racist government policies and social practices, or the place of Native Americans in American history – because the audience has not been able to relate to Native Americans as anything more than symbols.<sup>145</sup> To promote the film, Avco Embassy Pictures sent a group of actors dressed as “Indians” onto the streets of Manhattan before the New York premiere, pairing a real-world rendering of Native Americans as useful symbols with a film-world deployment of those symbols.<sup>146</sup> White people are at the center of the story at all times. White people as a group are the enemies of decency and justice, and white individuals are saviors who Indians cannot survive without. Placing the kind, pragmatic, no-nonsense Cresta against the colonel’s embodiment of heartless, racist imperialism, *Soldier Blue* deployed a common form of the white savior myth. The white savior was juxtaposed with a violent and uncaring white person, often an authority figure, and non-white characters surrounded the white savior and served as context as the savior character developed.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Roger Ebert, review of *Soldier Blue*, January 1, 1970, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/soldier-blue-1970>, retrieved March 30, 2015.

<sup>145</sup> Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 93.

<sup>146</sup> Hurst, *The Most Savage Film*, 156-157.

<sup>147</sup> Hughey, *The White Savior Film*, 47-48.

For all its efforts to set the story straight, *Soldier Blue* still engaged fully in the good guy/bad guy trope, with whites occupying both sides. Indians were merely props that white people used to tell each other a story about themselves. This approach robbed Native Americans of humanity every bit as much as the old Brutal Savage stereotype had.

*Soldier Blue*'s chief weaknesses, however, lie not in its cheap sensationalism, its technical errors, or its clumsy pontificating. A good documentary film about Sand Creek might include a detailed summary of the timeline of events, interspersed with Native American voices, recollections of oral histories, photographs, survivor artwork, and clarification by specialist scholars. But dramatic film productions cannot be documentaries. By attempting to tell an important story about Native Americans using white characters and a simplistic narrative focused almost entirely on those characters and their actions to save the helpless, vanishing Indians, *Soldier Blue* actually muddied public understanding of Sand Creek. As Frank Manchel argues, "Movies are not just escapism, and when they offer simplistic, emotional solutions to complex problems, they muddy not only the problem but also create cultural confusion."<sup>148</sup> The connection to My Lai confused audiences and again decentered Native American stories and experiences in a story (or at least a scene) about the experiences and stories of actual Native Americans. In the *New York Times*, critic Roger Greenspun argued that Nelson's directorial heavy-handedness fundamentally undermined the film's power to convey any political message. "Given a story of considerable sensational potential," Greenspun wrote, "Nelson has stuck everything (music, movement, dialogue, stray bits of location scenery) in its

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<sup>148</sup> Frank Manchel, "Cultural Confusion," in *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 103.

way.”<sup>149</sup> Despite Ralph Nelson’s best efforts, the film could not be a narrative of atrocities committed by the United States military against the weak and defenseless across multiple historical periods.

Denver’s reaction to *Soldier Blue* reflected how some Americans wanted to acknowledge past wrongs done by the United States government in the name of imperialistic conquest put forth by the film. They could not, however, overlook how cheaply exploitative, often technically and dramatically shoddy, and culturally smug and ham-fisted *Soldier Blue* actually was. *The Denver Post*’s Robert Downing was so put off by the film’s explicit depictions of decapitations, rape, and immolation that he refused to write a review for the film. Under the headline “Soldier Blue Gets Big B For Bad Film,” Downing wrote:

No purpose can be served in submitting a regular review of “Soldier Blue.” Since it’s obvious that the film was created solely for shock value, it can be said it succeeds in this direction. If the public wishes to see revoltingly-simulated horrors of massacre, rape and pillage, all the effects are here in sickening detail. The movie has no plot worthy of the name. Foul language, indigenous to the time and place of the picture’s action, serves no purpose dramatically. Actors are wasted here, and since no performance can have meaning in the general blood bath, it’s pointless to draw attention to anyone connected with the enterprise. Joseph E. Levine, Ralph Nelson and everyone connected with this presentation should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.<sup>150</sup>

This film was in part a demand for discussion and reconciliation of the kind of officially sanctioned violence on the Western frontier and elsewhere that had at one time been celebrated in Denver newspapers. Downing, for his part, found Nelson’s film so distasteful that he refused to be part of the conversation at all, even within the pages a Denver newspaper. Finger-wagging would have to suffice.

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<sup>149</sup> Greenspun, “The Screen: ‘Soldier Blue’ Arrives: Candice Bergen Stars in Violent Western.”

<sup>150</sup> Robert Downing, “Soldier Blue Gets Big B For Bad Film,” *The Denver Post*, August 27, 1970, 23.

Joan McCoy at the *Rocky Mountain News*, however, was much more forgiving. Acknowledging Sand Creek's contentious place in Colorado's history, McCoy wrote, "It's doubtful that this horrifying raid could be portrayed in a more powerful and shocking way than it is here. The extremely violent and disgusting scenes come at the very end and the impact is great."<sup>151</sup> McCoy differed with a number of other critics who found the dialogue unbelievable, the lead casting choices poor, and the love story narrative inappropriate. But even *Soldier Blue*'s most generous critic could not ignore the film's technical and continuity errors. How, indeed, did Honus – on the High Plains some distance from a tailor shop – acquire new trousers by the next scene when his original pair was shredded?

McCoy also called attention to the casting of non-Indians in the film's few Indian roles. If Nelson was concerned with telling an Indian story, several critics agreed, he was not especially concerned with casting actual Indians to tell that story. Despite the continuing presence of Native actors in Hollywood, casting decisions from the makers of revisionist Westerns had the power to dehumanize real-life Natives by reinforcing the older Western stereotype of the "vanishing Indian," rendering real-life Indians interchangeable or non-existent in films about Indians.

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<sup>151</sup> Joan McCoy, "Shocking, violent scenes in 'Soldier Blue': Gory account of Colo. Massacre," *Rocky Mountain News*, August 27, 1970, 62.

## Conclusion

Fiction can be a powerful and useful medium for conveying information about the past. No matter how carefully novelists and filmmakers examine historical records, however, the storytelling requirements of dramatic productions preclude the possibility that such productions can serve as works of popular historical scholarship. Life does not take place in neat, compelling arcs encapsulable within ninety-minute filmed episodes, and dramatic films always serve better as primary sources about the times they emerged from than as secondary sources about the times they depict.

Fiction can, however, stimulate public interest in a lasting way. It can inspire public and private discussions, as some of the films examined in the second chapter of this thesis undoubtedly did. Fiction can also inspire further inquiry and direct audiences toward scholarly history. A good book or movie stays with the viewer long after the last page is turned or the last reel plays. Movies about historical events can advocate particular points of view and suggest alternate perspectives toward the people and events of the past. At the same time, they can also reinforce stereotypes and hinder public understanding of history by framing events too narrowly, thereby implying the absence of other perspectives.

All the films and novels in this study center upon the white experience in both the historical and fictional narratives of Sand Creek. Despite the centrality of the Native American experience to the events of November 29, 1864, Native American voices are often conspicuously absent in their fictional retelling. John Haggott traveled to the Four Corners area to recruit Native Americans as actors in his ill-fated 1947 production, but the hero of the story was to be Ned Wynkoop or Silas Soule. *Tomahawk* (1951) used

Native American dialogue and cast Yanktonai actor John War Eagle as Chief Red Cloud, but centered the story on the white mountain man Jim Bridger. *The Guns of Fort Petticoat* actually depicted the massacre as an atrocity committed by government authority against people who were earnestly working to yield to that authority, but centered the story on a white man played by a real-life war hero and his need to protect the weak after his failure to do so at Sand Creek. Both Dorothy Gardiner's and Michael Straight's novels made excellent use of primary documents and challenged the proto-imperialist adventures of the United States in the nineteenth-century West. But these novels were critically limited in their retelling of Sand Creek when their authors framed their narratives in ways that marginalized Native American experiences.

Of all the treatments considered here, *Soldier Blue* went to the greatest lengths to depict the most brutal horrors of Sand Creek in graphic detail as means of shocking its audience into recognition of past and present atrocities. But it was essentially a love story inside a road movie, bracketed by graphic violence, with a white man and woman at its heart. In *Soldier Blue*, Indians are little more than scenery. The films examined in this thesis, then, were unable to cinematically "tell the truth," despite the lingering presence of the idea of Sand Creek among Coloradans and other Americans, because they could not conceptualize non-white figures as central and authoritative dramatic protagonists.

\* \* \*

To see how the specter of Sand Creek still looms in the minds of Coloradans, one need only to take a brief look at the comment section below *The Denver Post's* article on Governor Hickenlooper's 2014 apology. The relative anonymity afforded the Internet commenter sometimes gives comment sections the appearance of a collective id, where

ideas and attitudes appear as reflex actions with little to no contemplation or contextualization. Commenters do not often take the time to carefully craft arguments and counter-arguments the way that Dorothy Gardiner and George Dunklee had in 1947. Comment sections on the sites of twenty-first century newspapers are often rife with bellicose name-calling, puerile insults poorly disguised as insight, and the occasional outright threat. They can also reveal the persistence of ideas and attitudes that might not be confessed in polite company but which still inform human beings' opinions about events of the past.

*The Denver Post's* article on Hickenlooper's apology prompted more than 200 comments. Many of these commenters mocked the very idea of official apology, arguing that apologies for the events of the past are the exclusive domain of "politically correct wimps."<sup>152</sup> Besides, some said, apologies cannot erase past wrongs, and Hickenlooper was not born until eighty-seven years after the event he apologized for, so why should he apologize for something in which he was not involved? These comments personalized the search for atonement, suggesting that blame for the brutality of individuals rested entirely on those individuals, directing attention from the cultural and political structures that have facilitated brutality. It also showed, in twenty-first-century discussion forums, evidence of the persistence of attitudes and assumptions held by pro-Chivington non-fiction writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who saw any sort of official acknowledgement of wrongdoing on the part of the Colorado Third Volunteers as interference by pandering politicians and low-information busybodies.

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<sup>152</sup> Comment section for "Gov. Hickenlooper apologizes to descendants of Sand Creek Massacre," by Elizabeth Hernandez, December 3, 2014, [http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci\\_27060084/gov-hickenlooper-apologizes-descendants-sand-creek-massacre](http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_27060084/gov-hickenlooper-apologizes-descendants-sand-creek-massacre) Accessed April 20, 2015.

History is complex and messy, and cannot be encapsulated by any single person or event. In order to properly commemorate past wrongs, as Lindsay Calhoun argues, people must “[look] *outward* for causes for events and examining events in a broader context – rather than looking inward for redemption and seeking particularized and individual actions” to atone for such an event.<sup>153</sup> Some commenters made reference to Hickenlooper’s May 2013 decision to indefinitely stay the execution of Nathan Dunlap, who had been sentenced to death for the 1993 murder of four people. Would Hickenlooper have acknowledged and then pardoned Chivington for his violence at Sand Creek had he been Colorado’s governor in 1864? These comments again revealed the persistence of the notion of Chivington as liberator and the Plains Indians as Brutal Savages, as exemplified by the following framing of Sand Creek: “When can we expect an apology from the ancestors [sic] of the Sand Creek Massacre for the hundreds of burnings, depredations, rapes, murders, and destruction perpetrated on innocents by their ancestors along the South Platte, Smoky Hill, and Santa Fe Trails?”<sup>154</sup> Clearly, the issue is not settled for some Coloradans. Despite the radical transformation of American attitudes toward history and culture during the period between 1945 and 1970, dehumanizing perspectives toward Black Kettle’s villagers linger on in many American minds.

If filmmakers wish to challenge deeply-held beliefs and right historical wrongs, they would do well to consider retelling the story of the Sand Creek massacre, but taking into consideration a century and a half of evolving attitudes on what should be

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<sup>153</sup>Lindsay Calhoun, *Public Memory of the Sand Creek Massacre* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2012), 62.

<sup>154</sup> Comment section for “Gov. Hickenlooper apologizes to descendants of Sand Creek Massacre.”

remembered about the settlement of the West and how it should be remembered.

Foregrounding the biographies and experiences of those most deeply affected by the complex event and its messy aftermath – people like Black Kettle, James Beckwourth, George Bent and Silas Soule – can potentially commemorate a pivotal moment in American history in a manner that could still capture the public imagination.

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