Cheyenne hunting grounds are intersected by railroad tracks and telegraph wires in Jakob Gogolin’s 1930 painting set in the 1860s in the vicinity of present-day Russell, Kansas.
On October 28, 1867, Buffalo Chief of the Southern Cheyennes made a speech to federal peace commissioners at the Medicine Lodge treaty council in Kansas. “We are willing, when we desire to live as you do,” he said, “to take your advice about settling down; but until then, we will take our chances... that country between the Arkansas and the South Platte is ours.”1 A hostile expression of this sentiment came nearly a year later. On August 10, 1868, more than 180 Southern Cheyenne warriors and twenty Arapahos appeared in the Saline Valley in Lincoln County, Kansas, intending to make a raid on enemy Pawnees. Most were members of the Dog Soldier warrior society.2 While many waited and about twenty broke off from the main group to find the Pawnees, several of the warriors moved toward a homestead farm on a small tributary of Spillman Creek. They entered the house of David Bacon and, after begging food, raped the farmer’s wife, Jane Bacon. By August 13 or 14, the warriors had swept north to the Solomon River settlements in Mitchell County, then into Cloud and finally Ottawa County. Likely

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1. Buffalo Chief, Chicago (Ill.) Tribune, November 2, 1867.
2. The Cheyennes had as many as seven warrior societies. In 1920 Walter S. Campbell learned the origin story of the Dog Soldier military society from elderly warriors. According to Campbell’s research, which was supported by the ethnologist George A. Dorsey, the members of the society have always called themselves “Dog Men,” while “soldier” was never in the lexicon of the group. Buffalo Chief’s sentiment is also held by many modern Cheyennes according to tribal historian Steve Brady. For this essay I use the more common, if inexact, term “Dog Soldiers.” W. S. Campbell, “The Cheyenne Dog Soldiers,” Chronicles of Oklahoma 1 (January 1921): 90–97. For Dorsey’s work see George A. Dorsey, The Cheyenne, Anthropological Series, (Chicago, Ill.: Field Columbian Museum, 1905), vol. 9, nos. 1 and 2.
fuel by illegally obtained whiskey they killed about a dozen white settlers; seized two children as captives, whom they later left behind; raped several more women; and dispersed settlers to as far away as Salina. As other Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Lakotas joined the war on the plains that they found they could not share with settlers.

This period, from 1867 to 1869, saw the bloodiest conflict between settlers and Cheyennes in Kansas history. The Cheyenne war had broken out in earnest in 1864 in the wake of the Colorado Gold Rush, the Sand Creek Massacre, and subsequent raids of revenge. By 1867 construction of the Union Pacific and Union Pacific Eastern Division (later renamed the Kansas Pacific) railroads along with a mismanaged military campaign under General Winfield Scott Hancock, during which he ordered his troops to needlessly burn a Dog Soldier and Oglala Lakota village near Fort Larned, added to the Cheyennes' grievances. The Cheyennes' last hope for a free life on the plains, which Buffalo Chief spoke to peaceably and the Dog Soldiers pursued violently, depended on preservation of the natural ecology that had supported their traditional ways of life. In his 1867 speech Buffalo Chief alluded to the differences between white and Indian ways of living on the Kansas landscape, while in their 1868 raids the Dog Soldiers reacted to the ongoing changes to the physical environment of the plains that they found they could not share with settlers.

Although government officials hoped to end warfare with all of the southern plains tribes with the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in October 1867, the ensuing peace with the Cheyennes lasted less than a year, and the renewed war in August 1868 would continue until 1870 when the Cheyennes were finally overrun by new government designs. The perceived “right” of advancing agricultural economies into the coveted fertile lands of western Kansas was at the very core of federal and state policy after the Civil War. Absorbing Indian lands and assimilating Indian peoples into the mainstream economy along with emancipated slaves was all part of a naïve national optimism, at least in the North. Americans viewed Manifest Destiny in the late 1860s as one part of a greater Reconstruction Era that along with transcontinental railroads would quickly bring new western states into the national flow of commerce and politics. At the 1867 Medicine Lodge treaty council the government laid out, without prior witness from the Cheyennes, intentions to achieve these purposes. Accelerated by the Homestead Act of 1862 and its subsequent addendums, along with the Pacific Railroad Act of the same year, the spread of Euroamerican farmers across Kansas engulfed Cheyennes and Arapahos in an astonishingly short amount of time as settlers transformed the physical landscape of the Kansas plains more swiftly and dramatically than had any previous inhabitants. In less than a decade the equestrian life ways of Native peoples in Kansas vanished.

The transformative period of the Kansas (and Colorado) prairies that undermined the Cheyennes occurred in two phases, beginning with the rise of the equestrian hunting and raiding culture and extending to the explosive spread of agri-


7. The Timber Culture Act, Desert Land Act, Morrill Act, etc. Most of the post-1862 federal land laws were passed by Congress during the 1870s. States and territories also passed land grant legislation during this time.
culture. The first phase, from 1820 until 1860, gained steam with the hide and fur trade, the Colorado Gold Rush, and the end of the Little Ice Age that resulted in erratic climatic cycles and a “gradual” transformation of previous ecologies that caused a redistribution of wild game and altered hunting patterns. This creeping change of the hunting-trading sociology eventually redefined Southern Cheyenne political structures and even socio-sexual practices. The second phase, the accelerated spread of agriculture following the 1867 Treaty of Medicine Lodge, occurred at a dramatic pace—in a period of only nine months. When added to the earlier gradual changes that had already weakened Southern Cheyenne society, this second phase proved to be psychologically cataclysmic, a proverbial “breaking point” that unleashed unparalleled violence in Kansas in 1868, a year that historian Craig Miner called the “most destructive of the decade.” Rather than bringing peace, the 1867 Treaty of Medicine Lodge provoked and speeded up the transitions occurring between the two phases of landscape change and contributed to an explosive psychological trigger for renewed bloodshed in 1868.8

The years from 1867 to 1869 saw the bloodiest conflict between settlers and Cheyennes in Kansas history. The Cheyenne war had broken out in earnest in 1864 in the wake of the Sand Creek Massacre and subsequent raids of revenge. In April 1867 the situation worsened when General Winfield Scott Hancock, inexperienced in negotiations with Indians, brought his troops within a mile of a Dog Soldier and Oglala Lakota village on Pawnee Fork, thirty miles west of Fort Larned, with the intent of meeting its chiefs. The military presence alarmed the village’s women and children, who fled. Hancock took offense and demanded they return. When the men of the village could not locate their families, they too ran, and Hancock, declaring the Indians hostile, burned the abandoned village. This depiction of the event was published in Harper’s Weekly, April 19, 1867.

Historians of the American West have not yet fully examined the complex connections between ecological changes and human psychodynamics as triggers for violence between the United States and the Cheyennes. Many military historians simply claim that lost land and resources, late annuities, and hunger were most often the reasons for Indian wars, without attempting to contextualize the sociopsychological power dynamic the land itself possessed and how it moderated cultural determinism and levels of violence. Such interpretations leave the reader of history to see the relationships between Native peoples and whites as simply the inevitable

United States government officials hoped to end warfare with all of the southern plains tribes when they signed treaties with the Kionas, Comanches, Apaches, Arapahos, and Cheyennes near Medicine Lodge, Kansas, in October 1867. Scenes of the great council were reproduced for Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, November 23, 1867, featuring on the left side of the second row a sketch of the Cheyennes shaking hands with commissioners. The ensuing peace with the Cheyennes lasted less than a year, as white settlement spread across lands the Indians considered by treaty to still be theirs. Illustration courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
quid pro quo. But in 1868 and 1869 the Cheyennes tried to avoid military confrontation for the most part, and unleashed instead a wave of violence upon vulnerable civilian populations. As such the raids of 1868 and 1869 have served to foster the traditional myth of frontiers expanding and contracting in response to an ongoing struggle of savagery versus civilization. This myth has served to stereotype both Cheyennes and white settlers through the years. But when the psychology of the types of violence that individual Cheyenne warriors perpetrated against white civilians is examined more closely, we may illuminate possible reasons why this stereotypical portrait of the 1860s continues to persist. In order to understand this psychology however, it is important to first survey the better known environ-sociological changes that befell the Cheyennes prior to 1860. To a significant degree this “environmental power” is inexorably linked to psychological dynamics that, when operating in transformative physical ecologies, can and did produce enormous stress, confusion, murder, and sexual violence in Kansas.9

To understand the accumulative sense of history that led the Cheyennes to war against whites it is most useful to consider what roles both Cheyennes and whites played in restructuring the ecology of the Kansas plains after 1800. Until the 1860s Southern Cheyennes had little reason for committing violence against whites. They had traded at Bent’s Fort on the Arkansas; Forts Lupton, St. Vrain, and Vasquez on the South Platte; as far north as Fort Laramie; and even with the earliest gold seekers at the foot of the Rockies, although a case can be made that whiskey and firearms from this trade degraded their culture. But the psychological synapses that triggered impulses for sexual abuse and murder within certain individuals against homestead farmers in 1868 had more to do with changing landscapes.

The Tsis tsis tis, the Cheyenne proper, and their allies the Hinono’ eino’, or Arapahos, lived in a complex world few whites understood or cared about. They were part of a living earth cosmology that was dynamic with interactions among humans, other living creatures, and non-living forces of nature; a place that Kansas historian, James E. Sherow has called a geodialectic.10 What was the Cheyenne geodialectic and how had it changed between 1820 and 1868? The Cheyennes came to Kansas as early as 1820 from the Black Hills to capitalize on the continental horse trade that funneled up from the Spanish provinces and Comancheria. Many were followers of council chief Yellow Wolf and were from the Hevhaitanio and Oicimana clans. After the establishment of Bent’s Fort on the Arkansas in 1833 by Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain, trader William Bent married Owl Woman, daughter of White Thunder, who was the keeper of Maahotse, the sacred arrows that insured the prowess of Cheyenne warriors. Trade with the whites was fairly profitable for a time and the Cheyennes became middlemen in the horse trade. In 1840 Bent and Yellow Wolf’s people negotiated peace with the Kiowas and northern Comanche clans whereby the latter moved to the buffalo ranges south of the Arkansas while Cheyennes and Arapahos recognized hunting ranges from the Arkansas north to the South Platte. The government confirmed these lands in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. Yellow Wolf’s people had become the “Southern Cheyennes.”11

Years before, in the Black Hills, where the Cheyennes had undergone an ethnogenesis by embracing plains equestrianism, their prophet Sweet Medicine defined the mutual economic and spiritual nature of the world of the Great Plains by sanctifying the four directions of the universe and the elements within it. The earth, the air, and even water were alike. One breathed the air as a universal component. Water was a communal tribal element as was the land itself. The plants and animals within that environment had unique relationships among themselves, as well as with the earth and humans. Hunters had to perform rituals before harvest if the resources placed on earth for their use by Maheo, the creator, were to endure. They had to ask permission from the buffalos to kill them for food or the animals might not be present to help sustain them in the future. The

9. Kansas historians Rita Napier and Karl Brooks argued that America’s Indian wars are topics central to environmental histories but have yet to be studied adequately. Karl Brooks, “Environmental History as Kansas History: Review Essay,” Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 29 (Summer 2006): 122; and Rita Napier, ed., Kansas and the West: New Perspectives (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 1–18. Minnesota in the late 1850s and early 1860s experienced similar relationships between Indians and whites resulting from rapid settlement, which led to the Dakota War of 1862. California Indians experienced similar situations throughout the 1860s. One notable exception to Cheyenne attempts to avoid military engagement was the fight at Beecher Island in September 1868.


11. George Bent, Life of George Bent: Written from His Letters, edited by Savoie Lottinville (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 60. Although separated geographically, Northern and Southern Cheyennes still considered themselves one nation. The two groups would come together periodically to renew their sacred covenants Maahotse, “the sacred arrows,” and Issiwun (Esevone), “the sacred hat.”
To understand the forces that led the Cheyennes to war against whites it is useful to consider how the ecology of the Kansas plains was restructured after 1800. Years before in the Black Hills, the Cheyenne prophet Sweet Medicine defined the mutual economic and spiritual nature of the world by sanctifying the four directions of the universe and the elements within it. Earth, air, and water were sacred, and the plants and animals that lived on them had unique, interdependent relationships. Hunters had to perform rituals before harvest if the resources placed on earth for their use by the creator were to endure. They had to ask permission from the buffalos to kill them for food or the animals might not be present to help sustain them in the future. The landscape itself, then, was a fundamental element of Cheyenne cosmology as well as an economic base. By 1860, however, the Cheyenne geodialectic had begun to fracture and the abundant resources portrayed in this drawing of buffalo blanketing the plains, The Herd, 1860, by M. S. Garretson, were available to the Indians only in smaller and smaller micro-biomes.

This geodialectic served as both metaphor and mediator between humans and Maheo. According to Sherow, the most significant element in understanding and maintaining any geodialectic is its keystone species, most often humans, who have the capacity to perpetuate or reproduce most of the geodialectic’s elements within the landscape, or biome. The central plains grasslands, which run roughly from the modern city of Salina, Kansas, to the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies and

visual landscape itself, then, was a fundamental element of Cheyenne cosmology as well as an economic base. To alter the relationships built into creation, by drastically and permanently changing the sacredness of the spiritual universe in physical ways through subdivision and private land ownership, was sacrilege to the Cheyenne religious belief system. Well-defined geopolitical and individual property boundaries had no relationship to Cheyenne spiritual boundaries. Communal interaction with natural and cultural environments that could reproduce and perpetuate themselves constituted, as interpreted here, the Cheyenne geodialectic.12

from the Platte River to the Arkansas and Purgatorie rivers, constituted the Southern Cheyenne biome from about 1820 to about 1860. By the 1860s that biome had fractured into a group of micro-biomes throughout the plains. The Cheyennes and Arapahos constituted the keystone species within this original biome from at least the 1840s. But they witnessed its gradual demise through a slowly decreasing ability to perpetuate and reproduce its building block components, or memes, which were both living and physical natural resources like grass, game, and water, and cultural memes like trade and the capacity for raiding and trading horses and maintaining at least some balance of power with whites. With the proliferation of horses and invasive components like metals, firearms, liquor, and diseases, as well as their increasingly complex relationships with outsiders, the Cheyenne faced gradual but persistent pressures to adapt their shrinking micro-biomes. They struggled, as their cultural orbit expanded, to successfully adapt many of their memes within an ever fluctuating geodialectic.13

Research on the destruction of Native American memes within the central plains biome during the first half of the nineteenth century and on how these ecological cultural changes undermined the Cheyennes’ adaptive abilities within their geodialectic is extensive. Review of it here may seem redundant, but is necessary to some degree in order to understand the level of violence unleashed in Kansas in 1868. By way of syntheses, the central plains biome began to deteriorate immediately with the pasturing of horses, an exotic introduction from Europe, which became an extensive grass consumer competing with buffalo, deer, elk, and pronghorn. From the 1820s to the 1840s most Southern Cheyennes favored the short grass High Plains along the Arkansas in what would become southwestern Kansas and southeastern Colorado. The High Plains consisted primarily of short grass graminas and buffalo grass giving way to wheatgrass and needle grass in the extreme northwest part of Kansas and into Colorado and Nebraska. Traversing these lands from east to west were riparian belts of mixed-grass northern floodplain forest along the Arkansas, Smoky Hill, Saline, Solomon, and Republican rivers. Average annual precipitation ranged from thirty inches not far east of Salina to about sixteen inches in the far west—less in times of drought. Despite the comparatively low rainfall, the short grasses retained some of their nourishment in their foliage above ground in winter, when farther east the mid- and tallgrass bluestems would become dormant below ground. The downside was that with the increase of horses the short grasses, if utilized year around, suffered from overgrazing. During times of drought Indian horses required three times more acreage than in times of abundant rainfall. One of the ironies of history is that horses, the very thing that empowered Native plains peoples, were simultaneously the vehicle that helped foster the gradual demise of Indian dependent ecology and the elimination of their once-dominant cultural and natural memes on the plains.14

With the advent of the buffalo robe and meat trades, Cheyennes embraced the American free-market system, often overhunting in order to meet market demand. In 1855 the Indian agent for the upper Arkansas estimated that more than 11,000 Indians south of the Platte were killing roughly 112,000 buffalo annually, or 10 animals per person. For Cheyennes the estimate of annual buffalo kill was 13 to 1. The Southern Cheyennes numbered around 3,000 by 1855 and according to one government estimate were annually killing 25,000 deer, 3,000 elk, 2,000 bears, and 40,000 buffalos.15 Subsistence estimates averaged 6.5 buffalo per person per year, and at least one historian has concluded that the excess for the meat and robe trades that was funneled to eastern and European markets, especially the supple hides of cows, reduced reproduction rates and helped to make buffalo far scarcer by 1855 than during the 1820s.16

By 1850 the so-called Little Ice Age, a three-hundred-year cooling period of the earth, came to an end bringing severe drought to the Kansas grasslands until 1867 and widely fluctuating cycles of moisture after that time. Emigrants moved at the same time to the gold camps of California or lands in Oregon, disrupting buffalo along the trails, introducing bovine diseases carried by their oxen, trampling essential winter riparian vegetation, and consuming, sometimes completely, scarce firewood on the High Plains. By some estimates up to one hundred thousand gold seekers immigrated to the Rockies in 1859, bringing more herbivores into the short grass ecology as well as an expansion of farmers eastward from the mountains. Ambitions of empire builders to advance the new Colorado Territory to statehood resulted in the transformation of the favored western portion of the Cheyenne and Arapaho biome, along Colorado’s Front Range, within half a decade, during which Euroamerican settlers transplanted to the area an entirely new set of dominant memes. The shifting of peoples also introduced illness, with two cholera epidemics spreading across the plains during the 1860s. By the early years of that decade the Cheyennes’ adaptive abilities were crumbling as their critical biomes


fractured between eastward expanding settlements in Colorado and westward moving settlements from eastern Kansas. Buffalo generally moved eastward following the settlement of Denver. Travelers in the late 1850s reported retracting buffalo herds concentrating in large numbers mostly in the riparian zones of the larger rivers of Kansas east of the 101st meridian. Within a couple of years of the settlement of Denver few buffalo roamed within 150 miles of the new city, although a generous herd still plied a winter micro-biome on the headwaters of the Republican River, an area that had borne comparatively less travel and freight traffic. The buffalo herds that migrated eastward remained there for longer periods after the Colorado Gold Rush, but they were also moving toward the white settlements advancing westward in Kansas following statehood in 1861.17

One of the few remaining viable buffalo ranges on the central plains in the early 1860s was in north central Kansas, stretching from the Smoky Hill north to the Republican River and its tributaries in northeastern Colorado. Winter range remained along the Arkansas and below to the Canadian River and extended farther east near Fort Dodge and Fort Larned. Excellent winter range in a riparian zone along the upper Smoky Hill River in what the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers called Bunch of Timbers became practically devoid of wood by 1867 due to travel on the Smoky Hill and the needs of Fort Wallace, which the Dog Soldiers regularly besieged in 1867 and later in 1868. The winter ecology of the area called Big Timbers that stretched along the middle Arkansas, the viable short- and mixed-grass riparian belts of the Republican forks, and the still excellent mid-grass buffalo summer range in north central Kansas had by the middle of the 1860s become vital micro-biomes as the lands surrounding them, principally along the overland roads, collapsed. The Cheyennes and Arapahos became more seasonally mobile, moving between the reliable remnant upland summer and lowland winter ranges. Horse herds suffered as the Indians now had to move more often in order to find suitable grass for their horses. In winter the animals often subsisted on Cottonwood twigs and bark. The changing landscapes rearranged the social and political patterns of the Cheyennes as they began a downward spiral within their geodialectic. Many of the Cheyennes’ traditional cultural memes suffered with these changes to the grassland biome. The Indians found it more difficult to maintain and reproduce the sociological building blocks of their geodialectic and to successfully adapt to the changes.

One significant attempt at adaptation that proved catastrophic was a major reorganization of Cheyenne political authority structures as competing factions within the tribe struggled for supremacy. During aboriginal times the elected Cheyenne council chiefs tried always to assure the welfare of their matrilineal “band” and its horses by regulating the semi-annual movements of villages. By the early 1800s, their roles expanded to include the duty of a trade broker with other tribes to facilitate horse trading agreements that would best benefit their respective bands. With the establishment of the American hide and fur trade on the High Plains in the 1830s and 1840s, these chiefs also became trade facilitators with whites. By the 1860s however, the traditional council chiefs redefined their roles. From the beginning of the intertribal horse trade, council chiefs, wishing to maintain beneficial trade relations, found it counterproductive to advocate war. As they were no longer facilitators of lucrative trade with whites by the mid-1860s, it was an almost natural evolution for them to restructure their roles to what historians have called “peace chiefs.”18

Origin stories always emphasized the superiority of the warrior or “soldier societies” of the Cheyenne Nation over the authority of council or matrilineal band chiefs, some of whom were now peace chiefs. But with the arrival of horses and the hide and fur trade, council chiefs gained superiority. That power evaporated in the 1860s with the changing landscape. During the clash with whites following the Colorado Gold Rush, the conflicts between traditional beliefs and the evolutionary roles of peace chiefs made it mostly impossible for council chiefs, especially chiefs of the Hevhaitanio and Oicimana clans, during this time see Moore, The Cheyenne Nation, 191–97. Black Kettle advocated for his followers in three treaties only to be killed at Washita in 1868. Historians have pointed out that a number of raiders in Kansas in 1868 and earlier were from one or another of Black Kettle’s villages. Lineal villages consisted of families that had a variety of men belonging to different warrior societies. But council chiefs had no formal cultural authority to restrict an individual warrior’s actions at any given time.


18. For the traditional and changing role of Cheyenne council chiefs in 1868 and earlier were from one or another of Black Kettle’s villages. Lineal villages consisted of families that had a variety of men belonging to different warrior societies. But council chiefs had no formal cultural authority to restrict an individual warrior’s actions at any given time.
to control the actions of warriors within their familial bands who followed their fellow warrior society members, most notably the Dog Soldiers, in attempts to oppose white emigration. The argument over tribal hierarchy polarized the Southern Cheyennes between band-structured peace factions and the warrior societies. Consequently the peace chiefs could only “speak” for peace, for they had no formal authority to “declare peace.” Nor did they ever have any authority and control to make decisions for the warrior societies and their individual members, a political power that whites nevertheless assumed council chiefs should possess. In Denver in 1864 Black Kettle and other peace chiefs told Territorial Governor John Evans that the Dog Soldiers had threatened to kill the chiefs if they did not repudiate the 1861 Treaty of Fort Wise. Evans claimed the peace chiefs were very afraid for their lives.19

The Dog Soldiers were also instrumental in restructuring residential sociology by weakening the traditional village reproductive structure within the geodialectic. For centuries when a man married, he went to live with his wife’s band. According to mixed-blood George Bent this was “one of the most fundamental rules of human social life among Cheyennes.”20 About 1836, after Porcupine Bear, a prominent Dog Soldier “headsman,” was expelled from the tribe for killing another Cheyenne (whiskey may have played a role), the Dog Soldiers began to establish a new residential pattern. Most of Porcupine Bear’s fellow Dog Soldiers decided to follow him and they brought their wives and children with them. Some of the Dog Soldiers tried to persuade or coerce their wives’ sisters to enter into polygamous marriage in order to increase the reproductive capacity of the growing warrior society and reinforce its memes. Some married Lakota women. These Dog Soldiers soon formed a new “patrilineal” band in defiance of Cheyenne custom. As contact with whites in Kansas and Colorado increased, the Dog Soldiers’ numbers swelled when more warriors from traditional clans joined them with their families. Council chiefs such as Bull Bear, Tall Bull, and White Horse, who were also Dog Soldiers, transferred their leadership skills to the warrior society.

The villages that General Winfield Scott Hancock burned in 1867 contained 111 Dog Soldier lodges that housed 610 persons prior to Hancock’s dispersal and 140 lodges of allied Lakotas that sheltered 770 persons.

19. According to Moore most of the peace faction clans had merged into one band with Black Kettle as the principal council chief. Most historians agree that it was these clans that were decimated at Sand Creek and diminished to eighty lodges. See Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 187–93. In respect to Black Kettle’s statement to Evans see pp. 193–94.

At the same time, the peace faction consisted of only 80 lodges and 440 persons. The next year, following the Battle of the Washita, the number of lodges of the peace faction declined to 47 and 258 persons. A decade later, on the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation and following the Red River War of 1874–1875, the Cheyennes returned to a traditional residential structure within the bands of the council chiefs. In 1876 agents reported 262 lodges and 1,441 persons living in traditional camp circles. But during the 1860s the Dog Soldiers, due to the shrinking of the grassland micro-biomes, defied traditional village structure to become the most numerous and politically and militarily powerful familial band among the Cheyennes, with members coming even from the northern people in the Powder River country as traditional clans all but collapsed. Some Cheyennes even considered the Dog Soldiers to be a third division of the Cheyenne Nation along with the Northern Cheyennes. The Dog Soldiers were determined to monopolize and defend the shrinking grasslands still remaining in western Kansas near the Arkansas and Republican rivers in winter and in north central Kansas during the summer that had suddenly become areas of extreme economic and cultural value.21

The Dog Soldiers also responded to the changing utilization of the plains by buffalo. The Dog Soldiers, like the buffalo, were moving eastward and, except for raids farther afield, concentrating in a center region extending during the summer from the Smoky Hill River in the south to the Solomon River and its well-watered tributaries in the north, and in the winter, when the buffalo migrated to available mixed-grass biomes of the riparian systems, making a spur northwest to the Republican tributaries or south to the Arkansas. The peace factions remained along the Arkansas in winter but, due to expansion in Colorado and the Sand Creek Massacre, they became crowded farther east near Fort Dodge. Some Dog Soldiers returned to their wives’ traditional bands along the Arkansas in winter and mixed with the peace factions from which peace chiefs had no right to expel them.22 Not only were Dog Soldiers moving into these same limited lands of abundant streams and prime summer buffalo ranges between the principal east-west roads in Kansas, so too Northern Cheyennes (either escaping the Bozeman Trail war or bringing hostilities south in alliance with the Dog Soldiers), northern Arapahos, Brulé and southern Oglala Lakotas, Pawnees, Otoes, Osages, occasionally some Kiowas and Comanches, and finally, after the Civil War, whites crowded into the same concentrated buffalo habitats that constituted the last remaining Cheyenne summer biomes. By the mid-1860s both allies and enemies of the Cheyenne had converged upon north central Kansas, where they competed for resources as the integrity of the grasslands along the roads surrounding this still functional environmental circle gradually collapsed and the struggle between groups for hunting grounds became more concentrated and intense than ever before.23

Especially powerful was an informal alliance that developed in the late 1860s between southern factions of Oglalas under Chief Pawnee Killer and Northern Cheyennes, followers of the warrior Roman Nose, who came south in 1866. They joined with the Dog Soldiers. This coalition of three tribal groups crashed headlong into other interests on the plains, including railroad construction crews, stage line operators, and newly arrived homesteaders.24 In 1867 the Dog Soldiers and their coalition allies maintained a tenuous balance of power with whites in western Kansas and eastern Colorado, conducting raids mostly against isolated military installations, stage stations, and telegraph operations along the Smoky Hill stage road and successfully evading Lieutenant Colonel George Custer’s pursuit following Hancock’s burning of the Dog Soldier and Lakota villages on Pawnee Fork. But the eradication of the Cheyenne geodialectic that the United States government could not achieve in war, it would try to achieve in peace. These renewed and hastened attempts to eradicate Cheyenne biomes led the Dog soldiers to a final desperate outburst of vicious attacks upon white farmers.25

21. Ibid., 315. Corroborated by Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 199. Moore calculated lodge numbers according to the standard value of 5.5 persons per lodge.

22. Winter living patterns made things difficult for the U.S. Army, although winter was the best time for a military offensive. Commanders found it difficult to separate peace factions from “hostiles,” as evidenced by the Washita campaign.
A
ter the summer of 1867 and its largely inconclusive military campaigns from the Powder River country to New Mexico, a federal peace commission traveled to Kansas to try and bring an end to hostilities on the south central plains amongst the roving tribes from Kansas to Texas. The site of the council was near a tree arbor of an old Kiowa Sun Dance camp, not far from the modern town of Medicine Lodge in Barber County, Kansas, about seventy-five miles southwest of Wichita. The commissioners’ purpose was to present pre-written treaty articles that would crush the Cheyenne geodialectic along with that of the Arapahos, Kiowas, and Comanches by transforming the grasslands to farms and turning Indians into Christian farmers. Their proposals were the first federal reform treaty on the plains to attempt such a complete physical, cultural, and spiritual metamorphosis of Native peoples.26

The government’s principal spokesman with the Cheyennes and Arapahos was Senator John B. Henderson of Missouri, the chairman of the powerful Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. His eagerness to come to a quick agreement with the tribes led him to make a few critical verbal promises that were not part of the terms originally proposed. Henderson became annoyed with the obstinate Dog Soldier chiefs Bull Bear, Tall Bull, and White Horse and consequently promised the chiefs that although they would eventually take up a reservation in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), they would not have to do so right away. Only after the buffalo were gone would they have to resettle. Henderson also told the Cheyennes and Arapahos that until that time they could continue to hunt in Kansas between the Arkansas and Canadian. No one was hungry, at least until spring. During June of 1868, as had been the case in 1867, buffalo were plentiful by December on their winter pastures between roads and settled communities. So the 1867 Treaty of Medicine Lodge, as the Dog Soldiers understood it, would at least buy them some time. The Cheyennes went away from Medicine Lodge believing they did not have to adapt to a reservation environment until they themselves decided to do so after the buffalo were gone. Henderson’s insincere assurances were nothing more than ethically bankrupt paternalism to get important chiefs to sign the treaty quickly. But from the Dog Soldiers’ perspective Henderson’s promises meant that, for the time being, the Cheyenne chiefs had signed away nothing. These promises never made it into the final written treaty, which the Indian signatories could not read for themselves. Government negotiators conveniently forgot Henderson’s guarantees after the peace talks concluded and the Senate left them out of the discussion when it ratified the treaty nine months later.27

The cessation of hostilities in October 1867 brought about by the Treaty of Medicine Lodge was short lived. By 1868 the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers and Arapahos, having always been wary of treaty promises to protect their summer hunting grounds, realized their doubts were well founded as whites poured into their biome. Most homestead farmers who came to Kansas at this time emigrated from the central United States, Scandinavia, or eastern and central Europe, and had never seen an Indian. Although some carried with them the cultural baggage of tales recounting colonial era captivity myths, largely a product of the northeastern Puritan tradition, few if any new settlers during the late 1860s had tangible grievances against the Southern Cheyennes. They came to Kansas, despite possible dangers on the frontier, with optimism, dreams, and hopes for a new life in the West, encouraged by prospects of good grain markets, at least until the Panic of 1873 that arrived alongside the drought and grasshoppers of that decade. Modern historians often attribute the renewal of violence in 1868 to a combination of hunger, lack of buffalo, late annuities, and readily available firearms, or simply note that whites fired first when the Dog Soldiers came through their land. These simplifications are misleading.

Most of the Cheyennes wintered along the middle Arkansas during the nine months following the Medicine Lodge Treaty. According to Edward Wynkoop, the Indian agent for the Cheyennes and Arapahos, buffalo were plentiful by December on their winter pastures between the Arkansas and Canadian. No one was hungry, at least until spring. During June of 1868, as had been the case in June 1867, the drought that had desiccated the area for

26. The final signatories for the government were N. G. Taylor, Commissioner of Indian Affairs; General Wm. S. Harney; General C. C. Auger; General Alfred H. Terry; John B. Sanborn; Samuel F. Tappan; and John B. Henderson. For the treaty see Kappler, “Treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, 1867,” 2:984–89. For a history of the newspaper media’s impression of the treaty talks see Douglas C. Jones, The Treaty of Medicine Lodge: The Story of the Great Treaty Council as Told by Eyewitnesses (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966).

27. Jones, Treaty of Medicine Lodge, 171–87. Jones claims that hunting rights above the Arkansas were not a big issue for many Cheyennes when violence was renewed in 1868. This was certainly not true for the militant Dog Soldiers. Actually, the lands in Indian Territory slated for the Cheyennes as a reservation in Article II of the treaty still legally belonged to resettled eastern tribes and the government had no choice but to let the Cheyennes roam above the Arkansas until the federal government figured out a way legally to extinguish land titles with those tribes and construct agency buildings.
nearly two decades temporarily subsided. Rainfall came to the Kansas prairies and the buffalo consequently did not move north until mid-summer when the dry weather returned, accounting for the delay in the Dog Soldiers’ August move to the favored summer ranges in north central Kansas. General William T. Sherman, who had already outlawed gun traders, now enforced the Indian Bureau’s decision not to distribute firearms for the summer hunt because of a May raid undertaken by a few Cheyennes acting in revenge against the Kaws in eastern Kansas who had stolen some of their horses during the previous October’s treaty council. The raid amounted to little, but because they stole some cattle and did some minor property damage near Council Grove, Kansas, Commissioner N. C. Taylor delayed the distribution of firearms from the Indian Bureau’s allotment until August 9. During the winter and spring, however, illegal gun and whiskey traders had plied their trade along the Arkansas between Forts Larned and Dodge. The Dog Soldiers who started north on August 2 or 3 possessed firearms from this illegal trade or had old weapons from the Medicine Lodge treaty distribution of the prior fall.28

A more realistic explanation for the Dog Soldiers’ venomous assaults on white civilians and their families in north central Kansas in August 1868 was the sight of agriculture spreading swiftly across the plains. The appearances of farms north of the Smoky Hill River was surely an unexpected sight for the Cheyenne, representing the worst possible kind of immediate and all-consuming threat to their geodialectic. Railroads, forts, and stage roads were one thing, but fields of corn and permanently settled white families were another. The unanticipated plowing of the last remaining viable summer buffalo ranges was nothing short of a catastrophic destruction of the Cheyennes’ summer micro-biome.

28. Estimates of buffalo numbers for the 1850s and 1860s may be tracked from correspondence of Indian agents sent to superintendents and commissioners of the Indian Office located in the “Letters Sent” sections of the yearly volumes of the federal Reports of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs, various years (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office). “Post Returns, Fort Harker, Kansas, August 1868,” Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916, Fort Harker, Kansas, August, October 1864–March 1873, MS 661, National Archives Microfilm Publications; Annual Report of the Secretary of War, for the Year 1868 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1868), 3. See also the statement of white settler J. R. Mead in Elizabeth N. Barr, A Souvenir History of Lincoln County, Kansas (Topeka: Kansas Farmer Job Office, 1908), 10–12, 14–18, also available online at http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/lincoln/history. On the much debated issuance of firearms in the summer of 1868 see Annual Report of the Secretary of War, for the Year 1868 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1868), 3; and Edward Wynkoop to Thomas Murphy, August 9, 1868, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Record group 75, M234, Roll 1868, National Archives, Washington, DC. Sherman tried to speed up the decimation in the north central Kansas biome in 1868 by ordering Lieutenant Colonel Luther Bradley to clear the region of buffalo. Bradley had little impact on the animals. See Philip S. Sheridan to William T. Sherman, October 15, 1868, Papers of Philip H. Sheridan, microfilm 86, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and Luther P. Bradley, “Private Journal,” September 13, 1868, Box 1, Bradley Papers, U.S. Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. For the army’s role in the destruction of the Buffalo see David D. Smits, “The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865–1883,” Western Historical Quarterly 25 (Autumn 1994): 313–38. The number of white settlers firing first on Indians coming through their fields is difficult to estimate. Certainly many frontiersmen of all occupations carried firearms when working at some distance from shelter. Federal depredation claims filed with the U.S. Court of Claims provided a means for people to file for financial compensation from the federal government for destroyed or stolen property in Indian raids. Claimants failed to report if they “fired first,” for obvious reasons. The illegal whiskey and firearms trade that helped enable the raid on the Kaws is convincingly reported in the Kansas Daily Tribune, June 6, 1868.
Senator Henderson’s promises at Medicine Lodge that the Cheyennes could continue to hunt in the region until the buffalo were gone led the Indians to believe that white settlers would stay away until that fateful day. But Senator Henderson, the U.S. Senate, and the Kansas state government had no intention of keeping their promises. Any and all means of speeding up the demise of the buffalo and transforming the grassland biomes to agriculture were justified as an advance of America’s postwar expansionist policy.

Much of the increase in white settlement in north central Kansas that angered the Dog Soldiers in August 1868 came in the nine months following the Treaty of Medicine Lodge. The big push came during the late fall of 1867 through the summer of 1868, with the return of adequate if short-lived rainfall. Settler Elizabeth N. Barr wrote that a “tide of emigrants” including “colonies” of European homesteaders swept into the region through Salina at this time. Within two years the census of 1870 would reveal an increase of about 8,000 homesteaders in the newly formed Lincoln, Mitchell, Cloud, Ottawa, Jewell, and Clay counties alone. At the end of the 1860s, the federal land office recorded that settlers had filed on a total of over six million acres in Kansas after 1862. The 1870 census also revealed a population increase during the previous decade of 239 percent and a population density increase from 1.3 persons per square mile to 4.5. In Lincoln and Mitchell counties, which witnessed much of the violence in 1868, settlers were pushing beyond the official survey lines ahead of these counties’ official organization in 1870. What the Cheyennes saw was a much larger patchwork of more and more farms and less and less buffalo range; old and new landscapes, economically incompatible, competing for supremacy. In a remarkably short period of time the landscape of north central Kansas had undergone transformation from what historian Henry Nash Smith termed a middle landscape, a transitioning, complex geodialectic, to a dramatically different system that replaced dominant Native memes with those of an entirely different cultural group. Sooner than the Cheyennes envisioned, agriculture would obliterate the grassland micro-biomes, leaving the buffalo a thing of the past, and sooner rather than later they would have to move to the reservation.29

The “boosterism” that lured settlers seeking land in Kansas during the late 1860s was undertaken by the Kansas government at what would prove to be a bad time. Perhaps premature settlement’s most ardent advocate was the state’s young governor, Samuel J. Crawford. Elected in 1864 at the age of twenty-nine, Crawford was determined to settle the unorganized western portion of Kansas as quickly as possible. An avowed Indian hater, he was equally determined to rid his state of the Cheyennes and Arapahos. During the fall of 1868 Crawford even resigned his lame-duck gubernatorial term to form the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry that accompanied the Seventh Cavalry in the Washita campaign.30 Whether or not he was aware of Senator Henderson’s promises to the Cheyennes that they could hunt above the Arkansas is not clear, but Crawford certainly did not go out of his way to warn prospective settlers of possible Native presence in the area. Judging from his activities as practically a one-man welcoming committee for homesteaders, he apparently thought the newcomers would face no danger from Indians following the signing of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge. More probably he simply ignored any possible danger. At the end of 1867 the governor wrote in his journal that, despite the recent Indian war, immigrants were continuing to pour into the state and there was “evidence of prosperity in all directions. New fields, new orchards, new houses, new towns, and new fences, were here reflecting the light and influence of progressive civilization.” Little did Crawford realize that his bombastic boosterism—his assurances that new settlers would be safe and prosper—was not only premature but irresponsible as well. Certainly new settlers had no idea of the violence that was about to befall them.31

Imagine the fury of the Cheyennes when their eyes first gazed upon the new settlement they believed would not yet be present in the middle of their last great summer hunting range. These hunting lands that Senator Henderson had assured them were still theirs were now


carved into units of private property that whites had suddenly transformed to agriculture. Throughout the following winter along the Arkansas the Cheyennes saw an influx of surveyors. More surveys meant more railroads and certainly more farms. If they did nothing to alter this scene, farms would only increase in size and number, and would quickly erase the Cheyennes’ summer micro-biome. Essentially, these Cheyennes considered the presence of new farms and families an illegal but perhaps predictable invasion. Although many of the Dog Soldiers had never put much hope in the treaty, they did register Senator Henderson’s assurances in October 1867 and they viewed new white settlements as a kind of clandestine assault on their political flank.32

The violence the retaliatory Dog Soldiers unleashed in north central Kansas had but one inevitable consequence. The mutual retribution that followed was harsh, and the war took a terrible toll on whites and Indians alike. Non-combatant Indian women and men suffered as assuredly as did whites during and after the Washita campaign of November 1868. And while the Republican River Expedition and the Battle of Summit Springs in 1869 ended the Dog Soldiers’ military threat, civilians suffered their effects. By 1870 the vagaries of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge had become concrete conventions imposed by military conquest rather than negotiated agreement. These policies soon impoverished the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahos as they attempted to adapt their old subsistence patterns to an impossible environment at Darlington Agency, Indian Territory. Except for isolated raids against expansion of the Kansas Pacific Railroad into Colorado, peace had come to the central plains. Colonialism now engulfed the Cheyennes and Arapahos, a condition they continue to deal with today. No longer do Cheyenne natural and cultural memes dominate the geodialectic of humans as a keystone species on the central plains.33

Much of the increase in white settlement in north central Kansas that angered the Dog Soldiers came in the nine months following the Treaty of Medicine Lodge and was encouraged by the state’s young governor, Samuel J. Crawford. Kansas’s third governor, serving from 1865 until 1868, Crawford was determined to settle the unorganized western portion of Kansas quickly. An avowed Indian hater, he was equally determined to rid his state of the Cheyennes and Arapahos. During the fall of 1868 Crawford even resigned his lame-duck gubernatorial term to form the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry that accompanied the Seventh Cavalry in the Washita campaign.

Beginning in the twentieth century, settlers set out to pen the first histories of the 1868 raids. These narratives were more a product of Progressive-era historical memory than balanced history. They predictably reflected the times during which they were written, in the decade after the Census Bureau of 1890 had unrealistically proclaimed the frontier closed and as Americans nostalgically thirsted for magnified stories stressing the sacrifices pioneers made to build civilization.
and defeat savagery.34 Writers like Christian Bernhardt in 1910, Adolph Roenigk in the 1930s, and Carl Coke Rister in the 1940s, utilizing many settler reminiscences and accounts from early hometown newspapers, promoted the same one-dimensional themes, often couched in ethnocentric language. These writers, like the self-proclaimed “local historian” settlers and Kansas newspaper editors before them, wrote mostly singular, episodic narratives that made no attempt to contextualize the interplay between the diverse multicultural presence and the magnitude of environmental changes in Kansas by the 1860s. The earliest of these stories were ontological in their views of Indians as an inferior race and thus fulfilled a political purpose by justifying American exceptionalism and the right to confiscate Indian lands the federal government had granted the tribes in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. This thinking eventually imposed a collective amnesia, erasing from the historical narrative any prior meaningful habitation and corollary landscapes in Kansas. By the Progressive Era the Indian had become, as was artfully portrayed at San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, the “vanishing American.” As late as 1970 some regional historical writing, such as that of Colonel Ray G. Sparks, was openly racist and atavistic, loaded with superlatives designed to continue to depict Plains Indian societies as culturally motivated, in Sparks’s words, by “theft and killing purely for sport or tribal status,” rather than by a need to defend their lands and families or by aggression toward enemies who were determined to take their land.35


35. Bernhardt, in particular, went to great lengths gathering information on settlers killed in Lincoln County during the 1860s for the celebration of a monument to those killed in Indian raids. He wrote: “The settlers who were killed here were ... mostly foreigners, hence innocent parties as far as doing harm or provoking the Indians was concerned.” As for the monument, he stated: “It will always be our pride. Strangers will look at our inhabitants with a great more respect, and the purpose for which it stands will live when we all are gone.” C. Bernhardt, Indian Raids in Lincoln County, Kansas, 1864 and 1869. (Lincoln, Kans.: The Lincoln Sentinel Press, 1910), 45, 60. Bernhardt’s book is online at http://www.archive.org/stream/indianraidsinlincolnco186469/ and the纪念碑 in Lincoln City, Kansas, which only serves to make the topic seem like the proverbial “elephant in the room” and may unintentionally reinforce rather than eliminate savage stereotypes of Plains Indians. Recent studies that barely mention or ignore these raids include Chalfant, Hancock’s War, and Hoig, Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains. A recent study that mentions the raids but claims they began when a settler fired upon the Dog Soldiers is Jerome A. Greene, Washita: The U.S. Army and the Southern Cheyennes, 1867–1869 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 7–33. Captives like Clara Blinn and Sarah White in 1868 were held for trade, ransom, or negotiation with the military rather than merely as sex slaves.
Indian, after their captor’s initial rage had subsided, a tempting topic for additional study that could deepen our understanding of Indian captivity narratives. But the accentuated violence in the summer and fall of 1868 had little to do with raiding for captives to adopt into the tribe. In the logic of James E. Sherow’s ecological concepts, this violence was the product of the final breakdown of the Southern Cheyennes’ adaptive capacity within their geodialectic and the permutations forced on Indians as white farm families established a new dominant set of memes on the Kansas plains.37

To better understand the relationship between geodialectic decay and consequential violence, an exploration of recent research in psychology is necessary. In a groundbreaking study in 1999, social psychologists Julie H. Goldberg, Jennifer S. Lerner, and Philip Tetlock experimentally explored causes of rage and anger primed by an antecedent crime against societal norms. They concluded that people of all cultures are “intuitive prosecutors,” in that rage can be triggered by an individual’s witness of perceived perpetrators going unpunished for transgressions and crimes of all kinds and severity. Rage surfaces quickly within the intuitive prosecutor, particularly when individuals gather in groups, and may spawn unusual levels of violence in response to the witnessed crime that in other circumstances, when the original perpetrator is not present, might be more tempered. The violence that can occur when the perpetrator is present however, can result not only in killing but also in sexual abuse. The researchers also concluded that such violent acts are most often prompted by discrete emotional states caused by a sudden, specific, localized scene or event and not general “global moods” or generalized political beliefs. The study found that “anger over injustice in one situation should predict willingness to punish future transgressors,” unrelated to the initial offending scene. These psychologists inferred that one of the specific “scenes” that can produce rage, violence, killing, and sexual transgression is the sight of a sudden dysfunctional change to one’s physical environment. Recent studies of wartime rape support the thesis that men who are abruptly thrust into visually unfamiliar and potentially dangerous landscapes can become so emotionally disoriented in their attempts to contain and control that spatial environment that resulting psychotic behavior can lead to violence and rape. In such cases rape becomes a kind of “ritual shaming” to force compliance among the enemy civilian population.38


Social scientists who have studied wartime rape conclude that combatants who commit this crime show up in all wars and in all societies, races, ethnicities, religions, and political and economic systems, regardless of technological sophistication. Researchers have demonstrated that since the wars of the ancients rape has been used as an overt weapon, a “tactic” of total war to break the enemy’s will to fight, and a reward for victory, where women become a spoil of war. It is also sometimes due to a lack of troop discipline. Most studies assert that rape has everything to do with power and control and nothing to do with sex. In a 1977 scientific study of 133 rape offenders and 92 victims, A. N. Groth, W. Burgess, and L. L. Holmstrom found that rape of all origins can be categorized into two types: power rape and anger rape. They found no cases where sex was a dominant issue. However, at least one contemporary school of thought, “Biological Determinism,” concludes that rage and hatred of the enemy among individual combatants, usually due to some previous and persistent personal experience, triggers a deviant sexual desire to dominate enemy women to the extent of forcing sex with them, while such prurient thoughts may at the same time be repugnant among other individual combatants. The earlier and later studies agree that when wartime rape is not used as a specific, organized tactic of war (power rape), and is rather more random (anger rape), it is most often triggered by sudden, unexpected experiences, such as seeing a friend killed or a home destroyed, which create the type of spatial disorientation, quick rage, and severe revenge motivations that lead to killing males and raping non-combatant enemy women. Recent studies of American Vietnam veterans’ experiences have concluded that in an unfamiliar and little understood geodialect like Vietnam, where the enemy was often invisible or difficult to distinguish from so-called “friendlies” within the landscape of villages and cities, such abrupt sexual liberties were often unofficially considered by officers to be “standing operating procedure” used to control the indigenous population.39

The idea that geodialectic inversion can lead to rape was brilliantly demonstrated by war correspondent Daniel Lang in his highly acclaimed 1969 New Yorker article, “Casualties of War,” which was made into a book later that year and a major motion picture in 1989. Lang told this true story through the eyes of a private in the U.S. Army who chose not to participate in the gang rape and murder of a young Vietnamese villager by his fellow squad members in 1966. Their actions followed the ambush and killing of a popular comrade in a formerly friendly Vietnamese village.40 The notion of ritual shaming motivated by power or anger, which perhaps stood behind the rape described by Lang, helps to illuminate possible motivations for the abuse of white women in Kansas in 1868 by a few Dog Soldier warriors, while, at the same time, explaining the repulsion of other individual warriors who refused to participate in the atrocities.

If we are to believe the statistics historian Robert Lilly painstakingly revealed throughout his study on rape and American soldiers in WWII, American GIs raped four thousand women in Britain, France, and Germany between 1942 and 1945.41 Iris Chang estimated that twenty thousand Chinese women were violated by fifty thousand Japanese soldiers in 1937 and 1938 in a classic example of power rape, the infamous “Rape of Nanking.” This translates to each woman being violated by 2.5 soldiers. The raw figures of gang rapes are inestimable but would certainly drive the number of violations much higher. By comparison if we assume the commonly reported number of twelve women raped in Kansas during August 1868, rather than the military reports of fourteen or fifteen rapes that included violence south of the Arkansas River probably committed by Kiowas, and assume that each woman was raped by up to five warriors, we find that between twelve and sixty separate sexual violations were committed. Using estimates that suggest 180 Dog Soldiers began raiding in August 1868 (the number was higher by fall when more depredations occurred), it can be argued that up to 33.3 percent of these warriors perpetrated sexual assaults against the white women they encountered. At least two-thirds of the Dog Soldiers in Kansas in August 1868, then, did not participate in the violation of white women.


settlers, suggesting the sexual abuse that did occur was most likely motivated by the personal experiences of individual warriors. The comparative statistics of sexual violence in Kansas during 1868 may serve little meaningful purpose in relation to those of greater wars, but such comparisons are significantly more meaningless if they are used to serve political purposes by pointing to one society, culture, or race as being statistically more prone to wartime rape and therefore morally inferior to the victimized society.42

Unfortunately, people serving political purposes have too often embraced this view when it comes to estimations of Indians and their place in the history of the United States. What these comparative statistics can reveal is how the master narratives in America and other industrialized nations are told. Most academic histories of the United States and other industrialized nations where such wartime statistics can be objectively compiled do not overly emphasize the propensity in war of soldiers of one industrialized nation to commit sexual violations against women of another industrialized nation who may have at some time in the past been their enemy. For many years, however, treatments of wars involving tribal societies were rife with such portrayals, so that even today readers of the old episodic histories are influenced by nineteenth-century stereotypes of Indians as savages and thus more inclined to wartime rape than America’s industrialized enemies in other wars.

Recently, some Native American scholars have connected early ontological, episodic histories written by whites with the historically popular “captivity narrative” genre, which is only beginning to garner the attention of western historians as a literary device that has kept alive Indians-as-savages stereotypes. As historian Elizabeth Cook-Lynn asserted, the captivity narrative is a theme that “seems so necessary to the telling of the white man’s experiences in North America.”43 Sociologist Joane Nagel argued that the captivity narrative has since colonial times created an erotic ambivalence toward Indian men, a kind of subliminal “ethno sexual romantic longing,” that made the genre popular reading amongst white women for almost two centuries and, thus, also a cause for white males to demonize Indians. She asserted that the captivity narratives popular with women, which depicted natives as sexually dangerous, became a useful tool for male-dominated governments to justify war and Indian removal from areas selected for white settlement. “Such sexual depictions,” she wrote, “became a subtle

42. Many of the allegations of “gang rape” of white women by Indians on the frontier cannot be verified due to the exaggerated journalism of the era that helped foster yet more rationalizations for Indian removal. Claims of gang rape filed with the federal claims commission were sometimes exaggerated to gain sympathy from the court for the claimant’s desire to obtain money from the federal government for lost property. Depredation claims should not be taken individually at face value but should be corroborated with other sources where possible.

part of the ideological basis of U.S. Indian policy and eventually formed part of the master narrative of imagining the American West.” The narratives also formed rationalizations justifying revenge for such white atrocities as Sand Creek, a kind of racial reversal of the revenge and ritual shaming models that simply redirects finger-pointing and thus accomplishes little to advance reconciliation.

But Lynn-Cook asserted that the “tellers of the captivity narrative in particular are interested in Indians only to the extent that the Indian historical actors can be cast in specific roles, such as the wild man or savage occupant of a wild new land.” This characterization is then used to validate the “white man’s right to establish a colonial presence in Indian country and [argue] that such a presence was not only honorable but appropriate progress as well, justified by the stereotype of plains Indians as sociopathic murderers and rapists who needed to be removed.” Captivity and later ransoming of white women also raised the specter of miscegenation. Many white women returned to Victorian society after short captivities with feelings of shame that endured throughout their lives. Regardless of the immediate “stimulus” that triggered the sexual crimes committed by the Dog Soldiers in 1868 and 1869, additional study may offer possible parallels to these events in early Kansas and might demonstrate further that environmental decay and alteration played a significant role as a catalyst for that violence.44

In conclusion, decades of inability to adapt to gradual geodialectic change followed by a too-rapid agricultural transformation created by invasive white settlement in 1867 and 1868, led to significant manifestations of emotional rage by Cheyenne Dog Soldiers that triggered violence against white settlers. The instinct among these warriors in the summer and fall of 1868 was to effect an immediate reversal of the physical transformations that had overtaken their lands, by rolling back the swiftly moving agricultural frontier as the Comanches had done for centuries in Spanish colonial and Mexican Texas and northern Mexico. Destruction or appropriation of settlers’ property, a physical manifestation of white memes, was the customary practice in order to prevent those cultural memes from becoming dominant and snuffing out the Native geodialectic.

44. Joane Nagel, “Ethnicity and Sexuality,” Annual Review of Sociology 26 (August 2000): 121–22. See also Sherry Smith, The View from Officers’ Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 68, 108; and J. Namias, White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 109. Lynn-Cook, “The Lewis and Clark Story,” 29–30. The models of sexual assault discussed here suggest that rape committed “on the scene” of a depredation was most likely an example of “anger rape,” while sexual assault by Cheyenne men of captives held in their village was more likely “power rape” to force submission and acceptance of the captive’s circumstances and perhaps even eventual assimilation.
The raiders killed farmers, trampled corn fields, captured or killed livestock, stole useful material goods, burned barns and houses, and raped settlers’ wives. The rapes had little to do with Cheyenne norms governing sexuality or with innate savagery or collective cultural sexual prurience and were not particular only to Indians. They were acts of extreme physical violence stemming from anger and rage due to a spatial inversion that disordered Cheyenne landscape sensibilities and resulted in aggression toward a hated enemy, not due to a generalized “global mood,” but to the sudden, unexpected threat to the Indians’ place in the decaying geodialectic. The surprising sight of white settlement on the traditional hunting grounds that sustained their way of life triggered a powerful psychotic shock among many of the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Revenge was a powerful and mandatory psychological motivator in all Plains Indian cultures. By killing an enemy’s children and raping his wife, the warriors were essentially, in a sexist nineteenth-century understanding, degrading and erasing a homesteading male’s property as assuredly as stealing his horses, burning his house, and killing his hogs and chickens. Such actions were meant to destroy invasive white memes within the Native geodialectic.

All North American societies, including Cheyenne and white, both in the nineteenth century and today, consider rape to be deviant behavior. As historians we can never justify rape in our efforts to understand the sociology of past cultures. But those frontier journalists and second- and third-generation authors who wrote with the intended purpose of characterizing rape incidents to reinforce stereotypes of Natives as sexually dangerous and therefore culturally “savage” in order to justify the conquest of Indian lands were not only ignorant of the complex Indian cultures they portrayed, but were also unaware of the biological and ecological relationships formed on the very land they took from those Indian cultures. They did not understand that geodialectic upheaval was so potent a psychological trigger that it could provoke immediate, intense violence. Any focused scrutiny of the American West should include an examination of environmental history—particularly geodialectic socio-dynamics and consequential pathological reactions of keystone inhabitants, who were often incapable of adapting to transformational landscapes—in order to fully understand the implications of conquest and the politics of colonialism everywhere. KH