

Chapter 8

Plains Indians and Resistance to “Public” Heritage Commemoration of Their Pasts

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Introduction

Colonialist cultures readily and even painstakingly have commemorated events from their own histories. Historic landmarks and statues mark battles where their militaries celebrated glorious victories and even where their soldiers were gallant in defeat against overwhelming odds. They also have preserved and interpreted for posterity key nonmilitary events or places in their historical master narrative. As they moved toward a postcolonial position, some have been willing to memorialize episodes and places where those they colonized valiantly resisted conquest, indeed, where the colonizer even may have committed atrocities. As Ševčenko (2004) observes:

Around the world, people instinctively turn to places of memory to come to terms with the past and chart a course for the future. From makeshift roadside memorials to official commemorations, millions of people around the world gather at places of memory looking for healing, reconciliation and insight on how to move forward. . . . It's here, through the process of preserving the past, that evidence of human rights violations is maintained and made public, issues this evidence raises are debated and tactics for preventing it from happening again are developed.

For Ševčenko, doing so seems entirely reasonable and important, but hers may be a peculiarly colonialist view. Surprisingly, even when commemorations openly admit guilt and regret, those who seek to commemorate such events and places sometimes find the victims to be uncooperative and, not uncommonly, actively resistant to the plans for these sites of conscience.

The reasons they resist are the subject of this chapter, and are not at all simple, ranging from who gets to tell the story to the occluding language of commemoration and preservation. The primary examples will be American Indians,¹ and from

¹ I am fully aware of the variations of names used for American Indians and their political ramifications. I will use several terms interchangeably in this chapter, but mostly just Indian. Similarly, I am aware of preferred terms for Indian nations and the names they call themselves, but will use the more common terms by which they are known. No disrespect is implied; communication is the primary concern.

the Great Plains, but a final example will be cross-cultural. At the core of resistance is the view that the past is somehow a public heritage, an idea against which Plains Indian people have struggled.

A Public Heritage? Lessons From Archeology and Repatriation

That the past is a public heritage seems to be a value held primarily by members of dominant societies and rarely one held by indigenous peoples. As in many things colonial, master narratives overwhelm counternarratives by subsuming them and seeking to change the meaning of the counternarrative. The idea goes something like this: “What’s ours is ours and what’s yours is ours too!” There are numerous examples ranging from the control over and interpretation of particular archeological remains to control of and access to sites.

There are few better examples than that of the Kennewick/Ancient One skeleton. Even the names that people give the skeleton suggest the divide. Dominant society members and archeologists use the name of the place where the remains were discovered in 1996, an archeological convention for naming archeological sites; however, the Umatilla tribe uses the name “Ancient One” to indicate the personage of the remains and their cultural connections and responsibilities to them, which they claim to know through oral tradition. Found along the Columbia River near Kennewick, Washington, investigators initially thought the remains were those of a Euro-American pioneer based on skull features that seemed to be Caucasoid. When an ancient spear point was found embedded in a hip and radiocarbon dates indicated a date approximately 9,200 years old, contemporary archeological ideas about the early occupation of the Americas were challenged. Osteologists ascertained that skull characteristics statistically did not seem to be like those of the ancestors of modern American Indians and hoped to study the remains in detail. The Umatilla demanded the repatriation of the remains under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 and did not wish to allow study of the remains. Eight scientists used the legal system to stop the repatriation and to demand time to study the remains. Nearly a decade of legal wrangling eventually resulted in a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal’s opinion that the Umatilla could not prove cultural or biological descent, even to the point of saying that Umatilla oral tradition was inadequate as evidence. The court would not declare the Ancient One to be Native American (see Zimmerman (2005) for a discussion of the court’s decision and its impacts).

A near frenzy of the media ensued when a reporter misinterpreted the term Caucasoid as Caucasian, and the first scientist to investigate the skeleton imagined him to look like the British actor Patrick Stewart (who starred in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* series). This played into a centuries-old desire for a European heritage for the Americas – the Moundbuilder Myth – which was

especially popular in the 1800s. The myth was that an unknown race was on the American continent before the Indians and that they built the earthworks that Euro-American explorers and settlers discovered as they moved west. One speculation was that they were “white,” perhaps survivors of the Atlantean deluge or descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Though scientifically discounted, the Moundbuilder Myth has hardly died out, and with Kennewick it saw resurgence. Whether Kennewick was purposely used by the scientists to bolster public support for their case or just a byproduct of the Moundbuilder Myth, the media turned it into a science-versus-religion, us-versus-them, archeologist-versus-Indian struggle over control of history (see Thomas (2000) for a discussion of the historical roots of the struggle).

Nowhere is this issue more clear than in exchanges between dominant society members about Kennewick Man in a CBS Television *60 Minutes* segment aired in 1998. Lesley Stahl, the interviewer, queried Douglas Owsley, a Smithsonian osteologist, about the potential impact of repatriating Kennewick Man:

Douglas Owsley: “If there is no opportunity for us to look at [Kennewick and other similar remains], we’ll never answer our questions.”

Lesley Stahl: “We’re talking out *our* history?” [tonal emphasis]

Douglas Owsley: “We’re talking about *American* history, yes.” [emphasis mine]

Later in the program Stahl also raised the matter with James Chatters, the first archeologist to examine the remains:

Lesley Stahl: “Is this an attempt by the Indians to control history?”

James Chatters: “In a word, yes.”

When Stahl interviewed Armand Minthorn, a Umatilla representative, and asked if he was curious about what the scientists might find, he replied that the Umatilla did not want study done because it was not necessary. Their traditions provided all they needed to know about the Ancient One.

The importance of these exchanges is no small matter. They reflect the belief on the part of the dominant society that the past is a human history and not that of a particular group, while the indigenous group considers the past to be theirs and intrusion by others to be unnecessary and unwelcome. A related idea is that dominant society members seem to believe that unless sites are publicly accessible and interpreted scientifically, indigenous heritage is a “lost” heritage. In the case of reburial of human remains, this is almost a cliché, with reburial likened to burning books or stating that the past will be lost unless archeology is done, noting, as Clement Meighan did early in the repatriation discussions, that “[i]f archeology is not done, the ancient people remain without a history and without a written record of their existence” (1986: 6–7). Even in the *60 Minutes* segment, Owsley was asked about the loss of important information if the remains were reburied, and he replied that the information would become “as narrow as a grave.” At base, what this implies is exactly what the old truism states: “the victor writes the history,” which colonized people usually resent deeply.

The Damaging Vocabulary of Public Heritage

Even when such histories attempt to be fair, their vocabulary can be alienating. An effort on the part of the colonizer to “save” or “write” the past of a colonized people can be portrayed as an important, even noble, undertaking as in the Ševčenko quotation above. Protecting and interpreting heritage certainly is important to colonized people, but their views about how it should be done may be very different. Even the words used to describe sites or events from these peoples’ pasts can be interpreted differently and misunderstood. Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson’s (2006) cautions about using the word “abandoned” are instructive. They note that “to abandon” means to give up with the intent of never claiming a right or interest. Archeologists commonly use “abandoned” to describe sites or regions as if the people completely disappeared and were no longer around to use a place. The descendants of those who once lived on a site or used a place may see the place in a way very different from dominant society members intent on interpreting or preserving a site. Their reality may be that use, reverence, and a concept of sacredness remain, though usage and access have changed.

Jeffers Petroglyphs provides an example. Located in southwestern Minnesota on a site the Minnesota Historical Society preserves and interprets, Jeffers has more than 2,000 petroglyphs pecked into an outcropping of Sioux Quartzite. Some glyphs may be as much as 5,000 years old (Callahan 2001). The tendency for many is to think of the site as part of the archeological past rather than as a site of more or less continuous usage into the present by several tribes. Even during the 1800s when intense pressure was put on the Dakota, who lived (and still live) near the site, to relinquish their religion in favor of Christianity, Dakota people would sneak onto the property to pray. The religious observance at Jeffers did not figure in official discourse but it occurred. Although they no longer make petroglyphs at Jeffers, the site still sees intensive use by Dakota people and other tribes. There is no evidence over the past 5,000 years that the site was abandoned.

Other people see their “archeological” sites in the same way. At the 2002 “Toward a More Ethical Mayanist Archaeology” Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, a Mayan scholar, Lix Lopez, raised several commonly used archeological terms as troublesome. Paraphrasing him, he challenged those of us who were archeologists by saying, “When you use words like that, what you are telling us is that our culture no longer exists or is in ruins or that we ourselves are gone.” One word he complained about was “ruins,” which he noted could be interpreted as the remains of something that had been destroyed, disintegrated, or decayed. The Mayan reality, however, was that the usage of these sites had just shifted in a reorganized landscape. He also did not like his people being described as “vanished,” which implied they were no longer in existence and their sites no longer in use. The reality is that his people certainly were still there, and these places, though changed, are still there and often still used. Similarly, he disliked “disappeared,” indicating that something had ceased to be. The reality was that most groups or places continue. He hated the term “Mayan collapse,” which could be an abrupt loss of perceived

value or an abrupt failure of function, when the reality is that most places retain their function and value.

Another word might be added: “preserve.” *The Free Dictionary* (2007, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/preserve>) defines “preserve” as “to maintain in safety from injury, peril, or harm; to protect; a domain that seems to be especially reserved for someone.” When dominant society preservationists say that they wish to preserve a site, an implication might be that descendant communities are incapable of caring for their own heritage and that the dominant society can do it better, suggesting the implicit right of the dominant society to access a place while in some way restricting access by a descendant community. There is the fear that descendant community members will somehow damage a site or will not be as concerned about the place as those seeking to preserve it.

Miscommunication relating to these words has consequences that can prove difficult. The result can be a profound distrust by a group of indigenous people about all aspects of what scholars say about them and their pasts. Some even see it as an attack on their own beliefs. As a Prairie Potawatomi man, Chick Hale, asked at a reburial meeting in Iowa in 1980, “[W]hy do archaeologists study the past? Are they trying to disprove our religion?” (Anderson et al. 1980: 12). Most archeologists would reject this, but perhaps they *are* trying to disprove indigenous beliefs if they take the approach advocated by archeologist Ronald Mason (1997: 3):

[Archaeology,] by its very nature must challenge, not respect, or acknowledge as valid, such folk renditions of the past because traditional knowledge has produced flat earths, geocentrism, women arising out of men’s ribs, talking ravens and the historically late first people of the Black Hills upwelling from holes in the ground.

Stories told by archeologists may be different in substance and tenor from those of indigenous people, and for indigenous people to accept dominant society archeological or historical constructions of the past as true, they must alter or even relinquish their own stories and cultural identity. Their views of commemorative sites may be similarly affected. If they accept dominant society stories told about these sites, their own versions of what happened there may be compromised. They also may feel that their emotional needs regarding the site are subsumed by the emotional needs of the dominant society.

The relevance of these ideas about control of heritage and miscommunication regarding preservation of sites is not limited to sites from the more distant past, but extends into the present. When preservation of sites of conscience is at issue, the problems seem abundantly clear. Three examples from the Great Plains from the time of the Indian Wars of the late 1800s demonstrate the range of responses and problems.

The example of Ft. Robinson and Dull Knife shows what happens when a site of conscience is developed and the stories of the colonizer and colonized differ. Wounded Knee shows the collapse of plans to develop a site of conscience when there is an almost complete breakdown of communication. Sand Creek shows that sites of conscience can be mutually developed if there is respect for the stories of the victims.

A One-Sided Site of Conscience: Ft. Robinson and Dull Knife

Located in the northwestern corner of Nebraska, Ft. Robinson was a focal point for the domination of Plains Indians in the late 1800s during what commonly has been labeled “the Indian Wars” of 1876–1890. The fort initially was a camp meant to oversee the Red Cloud Agency of some 13,000 Lakota (Sioux), named for the Lakota chief who had been victorious over the US Army, a decade earlier. Ft. Robinson is also where the famous Oglala warrior Crazy Horse was murdered in 1877. One of the most poignant stories is that of the Northern Cheyenne chief, Dull Knife (also known as Chief Morning Star).

Dull Knife, Little Wolf, and their bands were not involved in the Greasy Grass battle, more commonly known as the Battle of the Little Bighorn or Custer’s Last Stand. Although the Lakota and some Cheyenne were victorious in wiping out Custer’s Seventh Cavalry units in late June, 1876, Dull Knife and Little Wolf realized that the US Army would take vengeance on any Sioux or Cheyenne, whether involved in the Custer battle or not. Eventually, Dull Knife and Little Wolf’s people were taken into custody and removed from the Northern Plains to the Darlington Agency in Oklahoma Indian Territory. Conditions on the way were horrible, and on their arrival were no better. Therefore, after a few months of poor conditions, poor medical care, and several deaths, they left the agency. Pursued by the military, they fought a 1,300-mile running battle, successfully evading the soldiers until they reached northwest Nebraska. With winter coming, Little Wolf led his band to hide in the Sand Hills region. Dull Knife hoped to winter with Red Cloud’s people, but on arriving at the agency found that it had been moved to Pine Ridge. Soon captured by the military, his people were taken to Ft. Robinson where they were told they had to return to Indian Territory. This they refused to do, and they were incarcerated in military barracks. Held initially without food for about 10 days, they still refused to go to Oklahoma, and then were refused water and heat. Preferring death to a return to Oklahoma, on the moonlit night of 9 January 1879, they broke out of the barracks in the hope of making it back to their lands in Montana.

The stories of the Northern Cheyenne and military are in agreement up to this point. The military’s account is that Dull Knife led his people across the parade ground and up into the surrounding bluffs near the fort, but the Cheyenne story is that he sent out a few of his Dog Soldiers to draw the guards away, escaping out the back of the barracks, down to a stream mostly hidden from view, and then up into the bluffs away from the fort. The stories come into agreement when the soldiers catch up with the escapees well north of the fort and kill 64 of them in a buffalo wallow where they had taken refuge. Dull Knife and his family found a cave and were able to escape death. From the time they left Oklahoma, their story was presented by the Eastern newspapers as one of courage and honor in the face of harsh and unfair treatment by the government. After the attempted escape from Ft. Robinson, under pressure from public opinion, the government allowed Dull Knife, Little Wolf, and the other survivors to return to Montana and to have a reservation on their traditional lands.

The Cheyenne “outbreak” now has been absorbed into the master American narrative about the atrocities committed against Indians, and was made popular by Mari Sandoz’s novel *Cheyenne Autumn* (1953) and John Ford’s film of the same title (1964). The Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) has commemorated the event at Ft. Robinson with markers, conducted archeological excavations on the barracks, and even reconstructed it in 2003, using the military’s report of the escape. There can be little doubt of the sincerity of the historical society in their wish to make the fort a site of conscience commemorating the ill-treatment of the Cheyenne. However, the Northern Cheyenne have problems with it, which on first glance seem trivial, but on closer examination are not at all so, and the problems go to the very core of their self-image.

In 1988, I was privileged to be invited by the Northern Cheyenne to be involved in a project in which they sought to challenge the military and NSHS story of the escape from the barracks. My team worked closely with the Northern Cheyenne doing archeological testing to check the feasibility of their story (McDonald et al. 1991). They had been given a tract of land adjacent to Ft. Robinson that contained the escape route that their oral history recognized; they intended to use the land to build their own memorial to counter the NSHS story. Their contention was that the NSHS story violated the memory of Dull Knife, asking how it was that a man who had been able to elude the military in his flight, with ill and injured people, for 1,300 miles would do something as improbable as to move his people across an open area and put them in immediate jeopardy. Rather, Dull Knife used his Dog Soldier decoys to draw the army away from the actual escape. What the military and NSHS had done was to accept a version of the story that tarnished the memory of a man who essentially was a Northern Cheyenne culture hero. The Northern Cheyenne refused to accept this construction, despite the fact that the dominant society believed the variation of their oral tradition from the military story to be relatively minor and unimportant. They do not participate in the site of conscience because it does not recognize their oral tradition and the character of one of their culture heroes.

Almost a Site of Conscience: Wounded Knee

A decade after Dull Knife’s “outbreak,” about 50 miles from Ft. Robinson, Wounded Knee, South Dakota, saw what most historians consider the final encounter of the Indian Wars. Misrepresentation of what happened at Wounded Knee began almost before the 1890 “Battle of Wounded Knee” ended. The one assured fact is that the “battle” was a massacre of more than 150 mostly unarmed members of Bigfoot’s band of Minneconjou Lakota Ghost Dancers, but even that number is uncertain. Some state the number at 150 while others assert that it was more than 300 men, women, and children. Twenty-five soldiers died, probably from friendly fire. Twenty soldiers received Congressional Medals of Honor. Some hailed them as heroes, while others heavily criticized the Seventh Cavalry

soldiers and their commander, Colonel James Forsyth, for their actions. Forsyth later was brought up on charges, which were dismissed with only a criticism of his tactics. From the beginning, some people saw the battle for what it was, a massacre that marked the end of military resistance by the Indians. As the truth came out, the “battle” became a massacre, and over the years the dominant society in the United States has come to see Wounded Knee as a symbol of the many atrocities committed against Native Americans, standing as a heinous example of the brutality of America’s westward expansion.²

The site has few markers indicating its importance in American history, but not for want of trying. Efforts to commemorate the site go back to at least the 1940s. For decades, however, only the mass grave of the victims and an associated cemetery, along with a small church, marked the site. The site’s symbolism as a point of Indian resistance has gained additional meaning since the 71-day siege by the government after the takeover of Wounded Knee by the American Indian Movement in 1973. Since the early 1970s, the site has become a major tourist destination for people from all over the world. Many stop to read the sign and take the short walk to the mass grave.

In the late 1980s, local Lakota worked to build a cultural center, now used as a small museum and place for the sale of crafts. Other than that, only a large green sign at the edge of the nearby road explains the events of the massacre. A few tourists stop in the now-dilapidated cultural center, and some stop to buy crafts for sale there.

A century after the massacre, when the state of South Dakota sponsored a Year of Reconciliation (1990), the United States, which had never apologized for the massacre, finally sent regrets to the Sioux (Senate Congressional Resolution 153/ House 386, 101st Cong., 2d Sess.). Two years later, the proposal for what would become the 1995 Chief Bigfoot National Memorial Park and Wounded Knee Memorial Act surfaced in Congress (US Senate 1995), promoting an 1,800-acre Wounded Knee National Tribal Park. After study, the National Park Service (NPS) recommended several alternatives, the third selected for discussion in the bill. This alternative for the park had a unit on the Cheyenne River Reservation where Bigfoot’s band had traveled to Wounded Knee, with a trail following that route, and a larger unit on Pine Ridge Reservation with an interpretive center. Buildings not present at the time of the massacre were to be removed. A 17-member Advisory Commission would oversee the park, with representatives from districts on both reservations, representatives from the Wounded Knee Survivors Associations from both reservations, the Secretary of the Smithsonian, and the governors or their State Historic Preservation Officers from South Dakota and Nebraska. Management of the units would be through the tribes. On the surface, the park appeared to be a good idea, with lots of input from the American Indian

² Ethnographer James Mooney (1991) was at the site only days after the massacre. Reprinted many times, his book gives what is probably the most complete account of the massacre and the Ghost Dance.

nations concerned, but it died due to objections from those mostly closely associated with land around the site.

Wanbli Sapa (1996) provides an account of the problems on a website generally supportive of activist Native American causes. The article focuses primarily on the lack of representation and consultation of those who owned the land or lived on the areas that would be turned into the park. Apparently, there were many vested interests in having the park and memorial built, including those of the tribal councils and even the Wounded Knee Survivors Association, which the author claims now do not represent the views of the majority of survivors. The main source of objection came from the Wounded Knee Landowners Association (WLA), and also comprised many members of the Survivors Association, which claimed its members were not consulted about the bill or invited to the Congressional hearing. Most members were those whose lands and homes would be directly affected. Many would have lost their land to the new park, their homes removed to clear it of structures.

In a letter responding to the bill, the Wounded Knee Landowners Association (1995a,b) raised a list of 75 objections. The letter title called the proposal a “*wasichu* proposal,” that is, a white man’s proposal. There were several objections to the bill’s historical description of the massacre, ranging from calling the massacre an “incident” and assessing no blame for it, to the constant reference to Chief Spotted Elk as Chief Bigfoot, the latter apparently a derogatory name given by the military. Other objections seemed more damaging, claiming that the WLA members were not consulted in the feasibility study and implying that the proposal was another ploy by the government to reclaim valuable Lakota treaty lands. One objection asked about responsibility for damage to the sanctity of the site by contractors or tourists. Another worried about the contemporary cemetery, which is still being used, adjacent to the mass grave of the Wounded Knee victims, and whether it would be moved. The letter (WLA 1995b) concluded with the following:

No other ethnic group in this country has had to address concerns that the Native Americans have had to address. No other ethnic group has continually had their burial grounds desecrated. No other ethnic group has been continually played against one another as the Native Americans have. No other ethnic group has had to be violently confronted on its home ground and have the government lie continually in order to get what it feels is the best of the poor Indians. No other ethnic group has been shunted to unwanted areas, forced to live in extreme poverty, been denied by law to practice its religious [sic] (even voodoo was never outlawed), had its children kidnapped by the government and taught to hate their ethnicity.

What is apparent from these concluding remarks is that at least some Lakota see the proposed commemoration and park as yet another attempt by the government to harm them. In the WLA view, the government got the story wrong, told lies, attempted to take Indian land, and planned to turn sacred ground into a tourist destination. With these objections, the park proposal collapsed.

A Site of Conscience: Why Sand Creek Became a National Historic Site and Wounded Knee Did Not

The Wounded Knee Massacre was horrendous for the taking of innocent lives by an out-of-control military, but the Battle of Sand Creek, as it was initially labeled, might have been worse because of the grotesque mutilation of the corpses, even those dying yet still alive. Sand Creek stands as one of most horrible massacres of the Indian Wars.³ The gold and silver rush of the 1850s–1860s brought thousands of miners into Colorado, which put pressure on the hunting territories of the Cheyenne and Arapaho people. Some chiefs, who had gotten along with whites, were forced to sign an agreement that did not have the approval of most of their people. People objected to the treaty and refused to live on reservations or sell their land, and violence erupted, which sometimes has been called the Cheyenne–Arapaho or Colorado War of 1864–1865.

Black Kettle and his band of Southern Cheyenne and some Arapaho were told they would be safe and could camp along Sand Creek about 40 miles from Ft. Lyon in eastern Colorado. On 29 November 1864, Reverend John Chivington, an officer in the Colorado volunteer militia, attacked Black Kettle’s camp with about 700 men. Black Kettle was a known peace-seeker, a fact fully known to Chivington. Accounts of numbers of soldiers and Cheyenne vary, as well as the exact course of events. As the massacre began, Black Kettle raised the American flag and a white flag over his lodge thinking they would be recognized as peaceful, just as he had been instructed to do if he met troops. The attack continued without mercy under Chivington’s reported order, “Kill and scalp all the big and little; nits make for lice.” Initially reported as killed, Black Kettle escaped, and his wife, although she survived, was shot many times. Others were less fortunate. Pregnant women had their fetuses cut from their womb, babies were bayoneted, and many victims were savagely mutilated. Soldiers were said to have removed skin and pubic hair of women and wore them as bloody trophies stretched around their hats. Other body parts, especially scalps, eventually made their way back to Denver with the soldiers where they were exhibited for an admission price in a theater. More than 150 Cheyenne and Arapaho died. A sad irony is that almost 4 years to the day later, Black Kettle and other Southern Cheyenne people were massacred on the Washita River by George Armstrong Custer’s Seventh Cavalry, the dead also mutilated by soldiers.

But soon the event began to unravel. Within a month, word came that the attack would be investigated by a Congressional committee. By March of 1865, the

³ Numerous books about the Sand Creek Massacre provide a range of detail, sometimes in contradiction with others, but most are useful for descriptions of basic events. One of the earliest books on the subject is by Hoig (1961). For a list of others and for images of original documents, see the Tutt Library collection at Colorado College, available online at <http://www2.coloradocollege.edu/LIBRARY/SpecialCollections/Manuscript/SandCreek.html> (Viewed 18 November 2006).

committee was taking testimony,⁴ most of it extremely damaging. Chivington faced a court martial but could not be punished because he was no longer in the US Army. He was forced to resign from the Colorado militia, could not be involved in politics, and could not campaign for Colorado statehood. His guilt followed him until his death in 1892. Interestingly, the Methodist Church, for which Chivington was a minister, formally apologized to the Cheyenne and Arapaho in 1996.

Under the National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989, the Northern Cheyenne sought repatriation of remains collected from the massacre site by the US Army, at the time stored in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (1992). The Northern Cheyenne formed the Northern Cheyenne Sand Creek Descendants in 1995 and by 1998 had worked to put forward a Senate bill to establish Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site. Later that year Public Law 105–243, the Sand Creek Massacre Site Study Act⁵ authorized formal study of the site. Following the study, Colorado Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, a Northern Cheyenne tribal member, proposed the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Act, which became Public Law No: 106–465 in November of 2000. Thus, the United States authorized the site of the Sand Creek Massacre as a National Historic Site. Since then, the NPS, which will administer the site, has been acquiring land for the site through purchase, gifts, and trust agreements. The site will open in 2007.

During the time Sand Creek was under consideration as a National Historic Site, concerns of the Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Northern Cheyenne have differed considerably from the kinds of concerns expressed by the Northern Cheyenne about Ft. Robinson and the concerns of many Lakota about Wounded Knee. The feasibility study by the National Park Service (2000) notes on its cover that the study was “[p]repared by the National Park Service in consultation with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, the Northern Arapaho Tribe, and the State of Colorado.” The 1998 study act required the consultation,⁶ and about 20 tribal members and others attended the first tribal consultation meeting in Denver. There were “nine consultation meetings . . . , numerous conference calls, letters to tribal officials, tribal representatives and interested tribal members, and discussions with interested tribal organizations. In addition, nine information meetings were

⁴ Some of the testimony of participants, including Chivington, is available online at <http://www.snowowl.com/swolfscmassacre4.html>. Viewed 7 October 2006. Their words are both revealing and horrifying. The original testimony is from the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Massacre of Cheyenne Indians*, 38th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, 1865), pp. 4–12, 56–59, and 101–108.

⁵ The full text is available at http://www.sandcreek.org/project_pubLaw105-243.htm. Viewed 12 November 2006. The Northern Cheyenne provide an excellent web site containing many documents and a timeline of events at <http://www.sandcreek.org/>. Viewed 6 December 2006. Other useful documents are available at the NPS's Sand Creek Massacre web site at <http://www.nps.gov/sand/historyculture/people.htm>. Viewed 6 December 2006.

⁶ Consultation was required by other federal mandates regarding tribal consultation and dealing with tribes on a government-to-government basis.

held” on the reservations (National Park Service 2000: 13). Cooperative agreements with the tribes (the Southern Cheyenne declined) allowed \$10,500 per tribe to collect oral histories. Yet despite consultation and participation, the tribes expressed concerns throughout the process about issues of sacredness at the site: They wanted areas set aside for tribal religious use, repatriation of human remains, and burial of the remains of Sand Creek Massacre descendants. Many felt that the consultation was not done properly and that tribal protocols had not been followed. As well, they felt that the NPS had not listened to the tribes’ concerns and had not given oral tradition the same authority as scientific evidence.

Yet despite all these concerns, the Sand Creek National Historic Site is nearing completion, while that at Wounded Knee is dead and the Ft. Robinson project has gone ahead without the Northern Cheyenne story being told. Why should this be, especially when the factual and emotional content of the sites is so similar? The reasons are several and complex, and some are historical. The US government almost immediately investigated and condemned the massacre at Sand Creek, and although there was no formal apology, there was open recognition of the atrocities. Whereas at Wounded Knee several soldiers were honored as heroes, Chivington was admonished and essentially banished from Colorado. One major difference is that with Sand Creek, much of the initiative for the project came from the Cheyenne and Arapaho themselves, not from an outside entity. In part, the reason they became involved was that the National Museum of the American Indian Act was in place, and the Cheyenne were able to bring back remains of some who died in the massacre, which had the effect of augmenting the already sacred nature of the site. That the authorizing legislation was sponsored by a Northern Cheyenne Senator had no small symbolic significance. Indians were speaking for themselves on the matter.

The tribes saw the project as one in which they had real ownership. The idea was not forced onto them, a fact that was in marked distinction to the way that some Lakota felt the Wounded Knee commemoration would be and that the Northern Cheyenne felt the commemoration of Dull Knife’s escape was. Even though there were complaints about the consultation process, consultation with the NPS did occur, whereas at Ft. Robinson there was none, and at Wounded Knee, at least one important group felt left out. Even though some in the tribes felt that the oral tradition evidence surrounding Sand Creek was not treated on par with science, at least oral histories were collected. Ultimately, the reason the site succeeded was that the Sand Creek National Historic Site was about them, their history, and their loss. The site was not primarily about the dominant society and its needs for a site of conscience. Yet the site still can serve conscience as a way to remember and perhaps to find reconciliation.

Healing and Reconciliation for Whom?

Repeating a line from the Ševčenko quotation at the start of this chapter: people seek to “gather at places of memory looking for healing, reconciliation, and insight on how to move forward.” The descendants of victims, however, might say

that there can be no healing or reconciliation short of apology and the passage of time. They often choose to reject even the history of the event as it gets told at places of memory, because the story is seen as false or incomplete. As American Indian Movement activist Bill Means put it in a speech commemorating the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday: “We do not need your past! We know what our lives mean” (personal observation, ca. 1988). As Tuscarora writer Richard W. Hill (1999) put it regarding Wounded Knee, “[T]hey say it is a wound that will not heal . . . [A]s long as museums refuse to tell the truth, the wound created over one hundred years ago will continue.”

Are sites of conscience meant to keep alive the memories of atrocities so that they will not be repeated, or are they built to salve the conscience of the society that committed them? As is apparent from the three sites discussed here, sites of conscience take on qualities of the sacred, perhaps most evident in battlefield commemorations, to which the massacres may be related (see for example, most of the chapters in Linenthal (1993), especially the chapters on the Alamo and the Little Bighorn). Following van der Leeuw (1986: 52–53), every establishment of a sacred place is a conquest of space, made powerful because a place is appropriated and owned by some entity. One way to certify the sanctity of the site is to set up boundaries that keep some people out, that is, as he says, sacred places practice a “politics of exclusion.” For Ft. Robinson and Wounded Knee, what this means is that the sites essentially were appropriated by non-Indians as their own sites of conscience, and in the case of Wounded Knee, this meant taking land to do it. Though some Lakota supported the site, other Lakota saw the basis of that support as a way to “line the pockets” of those in tribal government through the tourism the site would bring to Pine Ridge Reservation. Although they would not literally be kept from the site, many feel, as in the case of Ft. Robinson, that at least their versions of the stories of the site essentially are exiled. Healing is difficult if the injured party has no primacy at the site.

Although the dominant society speaks words of healing and reconciliation, the Wounded Knee Landowners ask, why has the government never apologized for the massacre? Many American Indians consider an apology a good place to start if new relationships to the tribes are to be forged.⁷ In 2004, such a bill surfaced in the US Senate (2004), but aside from hearings, the bill has languished. The text “acknowledges years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the United States Government regarding Indian tribes.” It also “apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States.” Andrew Mollison (2004) quotes Tex Hall, then President of the National Congress of American Indians, who says, “It’s only one small step, but without an apology you can’t do the healing, and without the healing, we can’t come together as one country.”

⁷ An irony is that never having apologized to Indians, in 2004 the US Senate was willing by a vote of 92–0 to apologize regarding Iraq in a resolution saying it “joins with the president in expressing apology for the humiliation suffered by the prisoners in Iraq and their families.”

A crosscultural example may put Plains Indian responses to the matter of sites of conscience into perspective. The terrorist destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, took innocent lives of people who were no more guilty of “criminal” behavior toward Islamic peoples than the Native American people who were killed at any of the sites mentioned in this chapter. The survivors of the “incident” (the same word used to describe the Wounded Knee Massacre), the families of victims, the people of New York City, and the people of the United States have agonized over the trauma. They have lived in fear that similar horrors will happen again. Their lives have been changed because of it. They also have struggled about how best to memorialize the event and the victims. The “gloating” of the perpetrators about their victory has been difficult to bear, yet can be expected to continue while the conflict goes on. After time has passed and conflict hopefully diminished, would an apology from the perpetrators serve any real purpose? How might the people of the United States respond if Al-Qaeda said they were truly sorry for the attack? What if they said that they would pay to help build the memorial and would like to have their story told along with those of the survivors so that healing and reconciliation could begin? Would it matter who told the story, they or us? Many Americans certainly would have strong opinions about it and reject such a commemoration out of hand, no matter the sincerity of the apologists. That Plains Indian tribes are suspicious or reject the development of sites of conscience, at least on an emotional level, should be easily understood.

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