

The sand creek massacre term paper example

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Introduction.

In November 29, 1864, a contingent of seven hundred white American troops attacked a camp of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians in Colorado killing an estimated 163 Indians¹. It is one of the recorded atrocities of war during the Indian American Wars. In this massacre, the Colorado Territory Army Regiment managed to kill such a large number of Indians most of whom were women and children. The attack did not just stop at the killings; the bodies of the victims were mutilated. An Indian leader, referred to a tribal chief, Lean Bear, who was one of the negotiators of peace together with President Abraham Lincoln, was also killed in the attack. Today, the site of the massacre has been designated as a National Historic Center.

Background of Attack

As European Americans found a new land in the United States of America, they found groups of Indians living in vast lands mainly in central and East of North America. This inherently presented a major conflict since the new white settlers were seeking lands in which to exercise agriculture and extract minerals such as gold². Such conflicts were common in which Indians and American clashed in several wars referred to as then Indian American wars. To quell tensions and frequent wars several treaties were signed.

One such treaty was the Treaty of Fort Laramie signed in 1851 between the Indian tribes living in the American Plains and the European Americans who were shifting in numbers towards the west of the country. In the Treaty the United States treaty Commissioners and representatives on behalf of the United States agreed to recognize that the Indian tribes of Cheyenne and

Arapaho had legitimate ownership of vast lands between the North Platte River and Arkansas River. The treaty also recognized that the land extended eastwards from the Western Kansas to Rocky Mountains. This was vast territory in which the European Americans were only guaranteed safe passage as they moved to California for the west end gold rush³.

This situation was however soon to change. In November of 1858, gold was discovered in the Rocky Mountains. This discovery of gold produced an equal madness of rush just as the California gold rush. Thousands of European-American migrants moved through the lands of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians violating the terms of the treaty. These Europeans Americans competed fiercely for the minerals and were tempted to settle on lands near the gold sites. This further prompted the new Americans to consider renegotiating the terms of the original Treaty of Fort Laramie.

Towards the end of 1860, A. B Greenwood, a commissioner of the United States on Indian affairs, arrived at an Arkansas River fort to renegotiate the terms of a new treaty. In the treaty signed as Treaty of Fort Wise, about ten tribal chiefs, six from the Cheyenne clan and four from the Arapaho clan agreed to surrender a portion of land between Sand Creek and Arkansas River. This was a very huge portion of land as with regard to the vast territory they initially owned. In fact, historians estimate that the new reserve left for the Indians was less than one-thirteenth initial reserve⁴.

This new development in the land matter angered some Indians. Some band of the Cheyenne tribe referred to as the Dog Soldiers were unhappy with the manner in which the treaty had taken all land that belonged to them. This group of Cheyenne men was a militia sought of group and due to their

disappointment from the treaty; they vowed not to abide by the provisions of the treaty. In fact they continued with their normal lifestyle living and hunting forests that was a portion of land now not part of their reserve. The defiant tribesmen claimed that the tribal chiefs signed the treaty without the approval of the clan and therefore the treaty was not binding. This standoff created a lot of tension in the mineral rich region.

A separate important development is the break out of the American Civil War in 1861. This war gave the European-Americans a chance to consolidate an army. Several white residents of Colorado volunteered for the war forming a formidable force of men. After defeating the Texas Army in the war, the First Regiment of Colorado Army was sent to Colorado to act as home guards⁵. This First Regiment was commanded by Colonel John Chivington. This new army force was particularly hard lined against the Indians and claimed that they perpetrated frequent raids stealing livestock from the white settlers. White settlers also had the habit of killing tribesmen they met in hunting. This situation was dire and a war was looming.

The Camps

Though there seemed to be a war looming between the Indians and white settlers at Colorado, the Indians chiefs were against any wars and were determined to strike a peaceful deal. They approached the white settlers for a peace negotiation to end the tension. Leaders from the white settlers asked the chiefs of the Cheyenne and Arapaho to camp at Fort Lyon as a sign of friendliness.

In accepting the proposal, a band of about eight hundred Indians camped at Fort Lyon. The chief with a few of his band men along with other Arapaho

chiefs settled at Sand Creek about forty miles north of Fort Lyon. However, the defiant group of Indians was not party to the peace deals and thus were not part of the encampment. Thus in this new aura peace and friendliness, several able Indian men left the camp and went hunting leaving elderly men together with women and children in the camp.

The Attack

On November 28, Colonel Chivington marched with about 700 men from his first Regiment team. They marched towards the Indian camps on the eve of the attack drinking and celebrating their imminent victory. On the following day, Chivington ordered his troops to attack the encampment at Sand Creek. The first regiment was divided into two companies that is, company D led by Captain Silas Soule and company K led by Lieutenant Joseph Cramer. These two men refused to follow the orders of the Colonel to attack the camp, however some of the soldiers loyal to the Colonel started attacking the Indians. These soldiers attacked and killed many Indians most of whom were defenseless.

In a testimony to the congressional hearing, one Mr. John Smith clearly illustrates how the bodies of the victim were cut into pieces in a manner he had never witnessed. Mutilated and tossed all over the place with knives hanging from their heads. Children were also tossed on the ground mutilated and their head busted open. It was the most horrific scenes of his time, Smith asserts⁶.

Another witness at the congressional hearings explains how the body of the one of the chiefs, White Antelope, was cut from the ears and the neck so that the jewelry could be taken out. Another chief had his head scalped and the

soldiers cut off his testicles, ears and nose. Other witnesses recited the horrific happenings at Sand Creek. The fatalities of this attack are not exactly clear. While other historians place the smallest number at about one hundred, other scholars estimate that at least two hundred Indians lost their lives on that day.

The Chivington Regiment lost only a few soldiers. In the congressional hearings, about 4 soldiers were killed with about 21 wounded. These men further burnt down the encampment and as soon as the smoke had cleared, they returned to kill the remaining wounded. They also seemed to enjoy scalping the bodies regardless of the age or the gender of the victims. Chivington's men carried human genitalia as war trophies displaying them publicly at Denver.

Consequences

The consequences of the happening at Sand Creek were great. First and foremost, several humans lost their lives on that day. Helpless women and children lost their lives to able army soldiers wiping nearly the entire generation of a clan. Most of the Cheyenne who had camped with their chief the White Antelope were killed.

Survivors who had hid in holes emerged heavily wounded and only did so at the dark of the night. They moved upstream to the prairie and came back during the night to seek more survivors. After a few days of consistent night trips without success of finding any survivors, all hope was lost. They eventual moved to Smoky Hill to regroup.

This massacre had detrimental effect on the lives and traditions of the Cheyenne and Arapaho group of Indians. The power structure a leadership

stance of the clan was altered due to the death of the chief and other eight members of leadership council. Most of the chiefs killed were peace seeking leaders and their demise implied that all peace treaties and agreements had gone sour. This created more tension and hostility between the white settlers and the Indians. Additionally, the defiant Dog Soldiers group of Indians seemed to affirm one of their worst concerns about the white settlers, proving their assertion right as opposed to the position of the clan leadership. This was major blow to the leadership structure of the Indians.

Reprisals

After the Sand Creek massacre, many of the Cheyenne and the Arapaho warriors joined the Dog Soldiers band. This new alliance among the Indian groups sought some revenge against the white settlers in the Platte valley. They planned several attack with a force of about one thousand warriors drawn from nearly all clans. One of the most prominent attacks was the 1865 Port Casper attack in Wyoming in which several white women and children were killed⁷.

The attacks did not stop at Wyoming. Indian warriors continued with more reprisal in Camp Rankin and area along the South Platte. Eventually the Indians decided to move to settle at Nebraska in the Black Hills.

Investigation and Hearing into the Massacre

Immediately after the attacks, the acts of Colonel Chivington were initially viewed as brave and courageous against a formidable opponent who needed to be tamed. However, as more witnesses recounted the events at Sand Creek questions were raised about the entire incident. Two military

investigations were initiated and a Joint Committee on the Conduct of War also performed its separate investigation.

The panel of the Joint Committee concluded its investigation with a grim assertion of the conduct of Colonel Chivington and his men. In their report, the panel was short of words in describing the appalling and unfortunate manner in which a top military officer of the new republic conducted himself. The Colonel had been found to have deliberately arranged the camping site for the Indians only to murder them with inhuman décor using trophies of human parts. The committee recommended that the Colonel be punished according to the laws of the new republic.

In the military investigations accounts recorded from victims affirmed the findings of the Joint Committee on Conduct of War. A lieutenant who was present at Sand Creek gives an account of the Colonel's men mutilating genitalia and putting them on exhibition sticks. Other numerous testimonies confirmed that the event at Sand Creek was one of the worst events in the American History.

Analysis of How the Event Has Been Treated Overtime and Its Impact on Current American Society

The Sand Creek massacre has been a source of great debate among historians due to the complex nature of events that led to its occurrence. Several historians conclude that the massacre was perpetrated in an effort to undermine the Indians. Brown illustrates the irrational hate for the Indians by Chivington's and other European-Americans. According to Brown, "Chivington's overall policy was never accommodation and compromise, but vigorous war against the Indians whom he regarded as " a less-than-human

and savage race." 9 Similarly, Cutler describes other events that culminated in the Sand Creek massacre. In his illustrations, Cutler relates other cases of the Indian War that may have prompted the whites to take such drastic measures. In general, most historians conclude the Sand Creek event to be one of the most heinous atrocities of war.

However, other scholars assert that treating the Sand Creek case in isolation does not give a clear claim to the events leading up to the massacre. Some historians have taken to condemning the acts of Colonel Chivington and his men while others have absolved them of any wrongdoing. There also exists a debate as to whether the atrocities at Sand Creek constitute genocide.

Historians like Katz, S. have dismissed the massacre as genocide and argue that " the United States government never undertook a general campaign, never articulated a comprehensive policy, aimed at the wholesale eradication of the Indians" 10. He is supported by Clifton who argued that , " In over two hundred years it has existed as a nation, no U. S. administration from George Washington to Ronald Reagan has ever approved, tolerated, or abetted a policy aimed at the deliberate systematic extermination of Indians" 11

Some historians argue that the ' Kill and Scalp' order by the Colonel without regard to gender or age constituted genocide. On the contrary, others argue that the case should be understood in the context of wider ongoing military struggle between the US and the Indians who were occupying the plains¹². Hoig¹³, has been cited as one of the credible historian who tried to view the massacre from an objective point of view. His analysis of the case is supported by both primary and secondary documents from both sides and he

contextualizes the massacre by critically evaluating the faults of both the Indians and the whites and thus providing a more holistic understanding of the conflict without apportioning blame on any group.

According to Brown¹⁴, “ the effects of the events at Sand Creek left a more everlasting impact on the American society”. Long after the murders and the rapes by Colonel Chivington and his men, parents, teachers and student alike understand the cost of such racially motivated violent confrontations. They understand the reality that they could face should such a violent fate. It also led to the creation of specific irreducible land reserves for the Indian communities in Wyoming and Arkansas.

Conclusion

The Massacre at Sand Creek was an effort by the European Americans to assert their dominion over the indigenous Indians. While the Americans had sophisticated weaponry and properly organized armies, the Indians operated in bands of warriors who relied on old crude hunting weapons. Thus it was imminent that in any confrontation, the Indians would suffer more losses as compared to the White settlers. In understanding this, Indians relied on surprise attacks and raids at night. This gave the Americans a hard time in engaging the Indians. Luring them to camp site for a massacre attack seems an only option. However, the acts of Colonel Chivington and his men was a regrettable act that should be used to remind the people the consequences of racial intolerance. The site of the massacre at Sand Creek was designated a national historic site in April 28, 2007 about one and a half centuries later. The historic site encompasses a trail that follows the path of the Cheyenne and Arapaho during the years of the massacre. It also follows the path the

Indians followed during the winter of 1864 into 1865 as they regrouped and re-strategized following the attack. Today, some Indian still inhabit the areas not far from the Sand Creek Massacre site. Some Arapaho tribe men still live in Wyoming on Riverton.

Today the United States is generally a peaceful nation. After many civil wars and other kinds of social and political unrests, the United States has emerged a powerful and stronger nation. The many conflicts that America has witnessed have made American understand the need for tolerance and cohesion for the sake of peaceful coexistence. A monument has been erected at the site lest we forget.

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