

1 The *Times* and “the Indian Problem”

Many of the Western settlers are very anxious for a war of extermination against the Indians, and assert that outrages and atrocities will never cease until this is adopted and ended. But this in itself would be an atrocity of the most gigantic and inexcusable character. Moreover, it would not be near as simple or easy a matter as these exterminators suppose. We believe it would be a war thrice the length of that lately waged against the Southern Confederacy, and would entail great bloodshed on our side as well as the other, and also enormous expense.

—*New York Times*
September 15, 1865

IN 1860, the *New York Times* devoted two dozen news stories to what it would commonly refer to over the next forty years as “the Indian problem.” The sources of information were wide-ranging. Longer reports from the West Coast were weeks out of date, having been delivered by way of slow steamship. A January report from the West cited anti-Indian sentiments among white Californians. It noted that what the white settlers really wanted was “the Indians exterminated.” There were concerns about the Apaches in the Southwest, as well, and by April the news centered on the Comanches in Texas. A brief West Coast dispatch in May reported the murder of a Pony Express rider by Indians; this later proved to be untrue. July brought reports of difficulties with the Cheyennes, Sioux, and Pawnees in Nebraska. In early August, the newspaper carried an extensive story on various tribes situated in the upper Missouri River valley and the military forts located in that region. A front-page report in late October concerned the massacre of white settlers across the Canadian border in British Columbia by Snake Indians. Two weeks after that, the news included reports on the use of United States military troops on Cherokee lands.

The *Times* published the annual report of Commissioner H. B. Greenwood of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in early December. Greenwood wrote that the government had negotiated eleven treaties with various tribes since March 1857 and had gained more than thirty million acres of land in the process. The \$3,726,880 the government agreed to pay for the land would be held in trust for benefit of the Indians. (How this money was spent—or not spent—was the subject of numerous editorial complaints in later years.) Commissioner Greenwood expressed enthusiastic support for the nation's policy toward the Native Americans—often "aborigines" in the news and editorial columns of the *Times*—and claimed that "the problem as to the Indians' capability of elevation in the social scale has been satisfactorily solved." He stated full confidence that "the experiment of engrafting the habits of civilized life upon the wild stem of savage existence has been a success" and needed only further development "to insure its complete triumph." That, of course, would require additional appropriations by Congress.

But the news reports in the *Times* already had offered ample evidence that the commissioner's hopes of elevating the Native Americans needed to be balanced by somewhat greater awareness that "civilized life" remained an elusive goal among some white citizens as well as Indians. The Indian problem, it was clear, involved aggression on both sides.

For example, the troops called into service on the Cherokee lands had to forcibly remove illegal white squatters bent on occupying Indian territory. And correspondence from the West eventually sketched in vivid detail a massacre of some two hundred peaceful Indians at a settlement near Eureka, California, called Indian Island. Although that slaughter of innocent men, women, and children apparently was carried out by a band of desperadoes, the California correspondent for the *Times* reported, the murderers clearly had to have been aided and abetted by local farmers and ranchers. The correspondent found no reason to doubt information that the intruders knew the Indians were without weapons and therefore defenseless and that, "entering lodge after lodge, they dirked the sleeping, and with axes split open and crushed the skulls of the women and children."

Editorially, the *Times* demonstrated little clear direction as yet relative to the Indian problem. It expressed concern in March about frontier posts that created business for "thieving, murdering Indians," who in turn were sheltered, armed, and fed by the Interior Department. An April editorial warned of the danger that Indian problems in Texas were being used as a flimsy pre-

text to put troops on the border as a prelude to war with Mexico. And near the end of the year, an editorial expressed the newspaper's ire over the high cost of the government's Indian policy—without much attention to the policy's relative success or failure.

Inevitably, attention to the Indian problem diminished as the nation moved closer to civil war. In January 1861, the *Times* reported that Catawba Indians in South Carolina were involved in the secession movement. A later story dealt with an alliance between Missouri Cherokees and the Confederate Army, while the editorial page denounced the secession of Texas tribes. Some of these Indians held slaves, the *Times* noted, and their loss was good riddance. But a September editorial, "The Indian Allies of Secession," implied that the Confederates were taking advantage of ignorant savages; it expressed concern that "Southern civilization" might enslave them and wipe them off the face of the earth.

Despite the news and editorial columns' concentration on the war over the next several months, however, circumstance assured the Indian problem a continuing share of space. Early 1862 brought stories on conflicts in Kansas, Colorado, California, and Utah. Then, in August, a disagreement between the Sioux and white settlers in Minnesota turned violent and bloody, leading to hundreds of deaths. The *Times* editorially called for aid to the "massacre victims" and lauded New Yorkers for their fund-raising efforts. It demanded that the Sioux be exiled from Minnesota but saw in this an act of mercy. It noted that not all the Sioux were guilty of crimes against the whites and argued that removing those not guilty was the best way to protect them from potential white mob action.

When three hundred Sioux were convicted of murder and sentenced to hang, the *Times* supported President Abraham Lincoln's pardon of all but thirty-nine of those convicted. Although the atrocities had been cold-blooded and shocking, it contended in follow-up editorials, the execution of three hundred Indians would be "an awful event," an event "without example . . . in any Christian nation."

Barely emerging was a general *Times* editorial policy on the Indian problem. Over the next several decades, the *Times* would support the cause of the Native Americans on most fronts. *Times* editorials would give the Indians the benefit of the doubt in questions of aggression, assuring readers that virtually every instance of open conflict could be found to have originated with injustices by whites. They would praise the oratorical abilities of the chiefs

and commend the patience and forbearance of tribes that suffered the consequences of what the *Times* saw as misguided, inconsistent, and deceitful government policy. They would express open and sincere admiration for the skill and courage of Indians as warriors. And they would be tenacious in their utter contempt for the provocative and unceasing drumbeat of a complex war machine of commercial interests that stood to benefit financially from armed confrontation on the frontier.

In the coming months and years, the *Times* editorial columns would hammer at the failure of presidents and Congress alike to develop a rational and humane national policy toward the Indians and would attack with some vigor the corrupt public officials responsible for mismanaging the policies that did exist. The newspaper would be unwavering in its insistence that promises made to the Native Americans should be kept, that reservation lands set aside for them should be inviolate. It would maintain that, because white encroachment had robbed the Indians of their ability to survive by hunting and made them "wards of the nation," the government had an obligation to help educate and train them so they could make their way in the menacing world of the whites.

But at the same time, *Times* readers would almost certainly notice a marked ambivalence in the tone of editorials on the Native Americans. The editorials would never deal with the Indian problem from the perspective of objective commentary; instead, the writers would steadfastly couch their views in terms of "we" and "they." Their personal passions often would seem paradoxical and sometimes at odds with the general institutional views of the *Times*. Editorials expressing positions fortuitous to the Indians still were likely to be laced with derogatory terms; the "aborigines" also might be "red-skins," "greasy red men," "copper-colored inhabitants of the plains," or "dusky savages" described as lazy and shiftless, particularly vulnerable to the ravages of whiskey. In addition, *Times* writers perpetuated vicious and stereotypical images in satirical editorials not specifically intended to touch on the Indian problem. Intended or not, a common image of the Indians portrayed by the *Times* would be that of an inferior race decidedly less advanced than white citizens. When one band or tribe did well, the editorial writers might imply that this group was exceptional and, somehow, ahead of others in its progress toward civilization.

There was an inherent mystique surrounding the Indians that clearly would influence the *Times* editorial columns and that the editorial writers

never would be able to dispel fully. Sometimes they would attempt to demystify the Native Americans with editorials of the "Where did they come from?" and "What do they want?" variety. At times they would treat the native cultures with dignity, at times with contempt.

But in this earlier time, even as the eyes of the nation were fixed on the Civil War—and before clear editorial-page trends were apparent—the news pages of the *Times* showed one factor that would be constant: So long as the Indian problem was important to the *Times*, there would be no shortage of targets onto which it might lock its editorial sights.

Military action against the Indians in the West continued. A majority of *Times* stories on the Indian problem during 1863 related to campaigns in Utah and the northern Great Plains. Bands of Sioux, Winnebago, Bannocks, and Shawnee bore the brunt of white military might. A year that began with the execution of the thirty-nine convicted Sioux in Minnesota ended with reports of General Alfred Sully's expeditions against Sioux bands across the upper plains—a campaign that extended through the coming year.

Action against Navajos and Apaches in the New Mexico and Arizona territories dominated early news reports in 1864. But summer brought more skirmishes to the north, the names of army outposts such as Fort Laramie and Fort Larned became painfully familiar to *Times* readers. Indian uprisings in Kansas and Nebraska were reported as well. The *Times* gave increasing amounts of news space to army accounts of activities across the vast western frontier, from Mexico to Canada.

Times opinion columns, meanwhile, explored a notable new element of the national policy toward Native Americans: the proposed relocation of the "semi-civilized" tribes onto the Indian Territory in the Southwest, which region was to be held "inviolable forever." In an August editorial, the *Times* said the proposal's greatest promise lay in its prospects for abolishing the tribal system and boldly suggested that it might lead, eventually, to citizenship for the "civilized Indians." To those who feared the Indians were not ready for voting rights, it asserted that "the loyal members of these nations [the tribes] are fully as capable of intelligently using the ballot as are the majority of the white men of Arkansas and Missouri."

The latter statement was typical of a chauvinistic attitude that recurrently crept into *Times* editorials. Time and again, the editorial writers contrasted what they saw as a more enlightened view of the Indian problem on the part of Easterners with a less generous frontier mentality they contended was

common in the West. But they also pointed out that contemporary treatment of the Native Americans in the West simply paralleled what had begun on the East Coast a century earlier.

Times editorials on the opening of the Indian Territory also emphasized another view that by now had become a fixed stand for the newspaper. There was no logic, the *Times* insisted, in dealing with Indian tribes as though they were sovereign nations. Although it had rigidly insisted that treaties with the Indians should be honored—and maintained that they never were—it questioned any policy that attributed elements of separate nationality to the Indians in the first place. "At some day, not far distant," another August editorial said, "the quasi-sovereignities of the tribes must terminate, the system of communal land-holding be abolished, and the Indians prepared to take their place among American citizens, or to pass away and be forgotten." This position would be stated a great many times during the coming years.

Peace on the plains, it now had become apparent, was not to be achieved easily. New reports of hostilities pervaded the news pages of the *Times* in the early weeks of 1865. During that year and the following one, scarcely a week passed without at least one story of conflict between the Indians and white settlers or Indians and military forces. Readers learned to accept as regular fare such tribal names as Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cheyenne.

On its editorial pages, the *Times* expressed grave concern about calls for a war of extermination. Troublesome reports of Indian brutalities all along the frontier made such a view understandable, an April 1867 editorial admitted. But it also complained that contact with whites had "opened the doors to debauchery, intemperance and wretchedness to the Indians, giving them in homeopathic doses the veriest attenuations of morality and virtue."

The editorial blamed "the belligerent army officers and corrupt traders of the [Indian] Bureau" for making it even more difficult to get a true picture of conditions in the West. That comment represented a *Times* view that changed over time. Corrupt traders almost always showed up on the editorial writers' lists of villains who could be blamed for the Indian problem, but in later years army officers usually got high marks. The *Times* wavered in its position on transferring the Indian Bureau from the Interior Department back to the War Department (where it once had been), at times opposing the idea outright and at other times seeing it as a positive move. It also would come to give great weight to the views of military officers and to generally express confidence in their evenhandedness in dealing with the

Native Americans. But it had learned early to draw clear distinctions between the behavior of volunteer militiamen and regular army troops. For years after Colonel John M. Chivington and his Colorado volunteers slaughtered hundreds of innocent Cheyennes and Arapahos in the Sand Creek massacre of 1864, the *Times* continued to cite that butchery as one of the darkest stains on the nation's history.

The end of the Civil War freed some of the army's most prominent military commanders for service on the frontier. Familiar warriors such as General William T. Sherman and General Phil Sheridan now were to be associated with the Indian problem. But *Times* readers also would grow accustomed to some new names: Red Cloud, Satanta, Captain Jack, Sitting Bull, Joseph, and Geronimo, among others. *Times* editorials would laud Red Cloud and Joseph, express grudging admiration for Satanta. But Sitting Bull and Geronimo were treated with outright contempt, while lesser chiefs drew little more than passing notice.

The outspoken Sherman, never friendly toward the Indians, nonetheless had great respect for their ability as fighters. The *Times*, in an early 1871 editorial on President Ulysses S. Grant's efforts to promote peace with the Native Americans, praised the president for taking a high moral ground. But lest readers forget the more pragmatic reasons for avoiding further clashes with the Indians, it reminded them that "Gen. Sherman has placed his opinion on record that fifty Indians could check-mate three thousand soldiers, and we need not go very far back in our history to discover the fact that Indian wars are the most expensive and utterly barren of result of any military undertaking in which we can possibly engage."

Given its Republican leanings, the *Times* commonly needed but little excuse to express its ardent support for the policies of Republican presidential administrations. It saved its most strident editorial voice for blasts at both Democratic political figures and rival Democrat editors. But when it came to national Indian policy, the editorial writers seldom exercised restraint in assailing the strategies of either party. President Grant—despite the various scandals during his administration—got significantly higher grades from the *Times* than most chief executives of the period on this front. But the editorial columns found a great deal to fault in the way policy was carried out by lesser officials in the Interior Department.

The *Times* praised Grant's "peace policy" toward the Indians. It steadfastly maintained that the problems arose from faulty execution of the policy and not the policy itself. Simply put, Grant's policy called for religious organi-

they would find out by and by that we, at least, have not told them lies. . . . (Ironically, it was only a matter of time before *Times* writers added "Lo" to the vocabulary of their Indian editorials. An editorial just three years later compared the status of the Indian and the Negro: "Lo is now predicted to be, like Sambo, permanently a member of the American community.")

The apathetic public the *Times* had been concerned about was jarred awake by the annihilation of General Custer and his troops by the Sioux on the Little Big Horn in Montana in the early summer of 1876. The setting closely resembled that which the *Times* had warned of more than a year earlier. But *Times* editorial writers, responding to the shock of Custer's loss, assumed that "so few newspaper readers have followed the course of the Indian warfare" that most of them would be astonished and alarmed. "We have latterly fallen into the habit of regarding the Indians yet remaining in a wild or semi-subdued state as practically of very little account," noted a July editorial. But an event such as the Little Big Horn battle, it contended, should make people realize the difficulties of the Indian problem yet to be resolved.

Custer's defeat once again left the *Times* in the position of having to defend the Grant peace policy. It was not that policy that outraged the Sioux, the newspaper argued, but the fact that the government for years had been systematically cheating the Indians out of their lands. After expressly assuring the Indians by treaty that the Black Hills would be left to them, it noted, "our people burst into the Black Hills region" and the Indians were told they must move. The *Times* then took a bold editorial position: "The wild leaders, embittered by a sense of their wrongs, burst into war, or more correctly resisted invasion—and on the late occasion only too successfully."

In the editorial columns of the *Times*, General Custer became something of a tarnished hero. The *Times* editorial writers paid appropriate homage to his courage and mourned his loss but nonetheless called attention to his brash and reckless military maneuvers that virtually assured his own devastating defeat. At the same time, the newspaper's treatment of events on the Little Big Horn and their aftermath demonstrated fully how troublesome the Indian problem was as an editorial issue for the *Times*. It held Sitting Bull responsible for what it considered an unnecessarily brutal battle. And while for a time it effectively rationalized the Sioux chief's behavior as simply that to be expected of any enemy during war, it never again was able to treat Sitting Bull with less than unequivocal contempt. He was the subject of

zations and other philanthropic agencies to join with the government in efforts to staff the corrupt Indian service with dedicated people who would run it honestly and humanely. When that policy came under fire in later years, the *Times* claimed that it had "never been reserved" in its criticisms of Grant's appointments or his public policy. But in the case of his peace policy toward the Indians, it defended that initiative as "a bold expedient" by which the president had "resolved to gain the co-operation of the moral and reformatory elements of our population, and to go for his workers where he would be most likely to get honest men." The Grant policy brought a number of Quakers, among others, into the Indian service. Their influence would be seen for years to come.

And yet there would be no respite from the Indian problem. The *Times* expressed concern that conditions on the frontier were growing more dangerous, President Grant's peace policy notwithstanding. There were new Kiowa, Comanche, and Osage outbreaks, and the army's forces were spread too thinly in light of the Indians' strength, it suggested in an August 1874 editorial. It feared that General George Custer, camped in the Black Hills, was vulnerable and in danger of attack. It noted that "chiefs who are organizing forces for the war-path boast that they can bring four thousand warriors against his little expedition." The *Times* still supported the peace policy but decried weakened military strength that it feared would leave the army ill-prepared for a concerted Indian attack.

In the first week of January 1875, the *Times* news columns carried stories of attacks on whites by the usually peaceful Cherokees. The next two months brought new accounts of conflicts with Cheyennes, Apaches, and Kiowas. Summer brought no lull. Hostilities were reported on the Kansas frontier, along the Klamath River in Oregon, and elsewhere. The newspaper paid a great deal of attention to negotiations that brought chiefs Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, and others to Washington and led the Sioux to relinquish claims to extensive lands in Nebraska.

Even so, according to a bitter *Times* editorial in May, newspaper readers were becoming bored with stories relating to the Indians. The public, it indicated, cared little for either the present or future condition of the "red man." It questioned whether any race on the face of the earth ever had been treated worse than the Native Americans. It condemned shallow editorial writers who considered it clever to refer to the Indian as "Lo" but took some solace in the fact that, "If Spotted Tail and Red Cloud could read *The Times*

scathing editorial comment for the rest of his colorful life and even at his death was the target of one final *Times* insult.

Months after Custer's defeat at the hands of the Sioux, an anonymous *Times* writer's scorn for Sitting Bull led to a striking example of the type of editorial-page paradox referred to earlier. "He [Sitting Bull] knows that no race of men on the face of the earth are so petted and pampered as the North American Indian," that writer said, ignoring the abundant evidence to the contrary presented regularly by the newspaper's own news and editorial pages.

Throughout early 1877, reports of Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Spotted Tail were prominent in the *Times*. Sioux war battle sites such as Greasy Grass Creek, Rosebud Creek, Slim Butte, and Little Muddy Creek were introduced to readers in the East. But this would be a short-lived war; April brought the story of Spotted Tail's surrender; an "official report" of Crazy Horse's capitulation was published on May 15; and by mid-June, even the dogged Sitting Bull was said to have been subdued. Yet another story detailed the surrender of the Cheyennes under Dull Knife and Standing Elk.

And the *Times* would not allow memories of the fatal clash on the Little Big Horn to fade. It continued to recount that battle through reports by Native Americans who told the story from their own points of view. A front-page story in May announced plans to erect a monument on that remote Montana battlefield to memorialize the soldiers who had given their lives there.

The Sioux were not the only Native Americans to occupy the nation's military forces during that eventful season. The *Times* also reported on a series of events in Idaho that culminated in a desperate and bloody war with the Nez Percés under Chief Joseph. That conflict would continue through early October, when Joseph surrendered to General Nelson A. Miles. In November, the *Times* carried a front-page story on Joseph's heroic and emotional surrender speech—just two days after it reported Sitting Bull's account of the Custer massacre on the Little Big Horn.

Even as it continued to vilify Sitting Bull, the *Times* all but venerated Chief Joseph. Editorials, as the Nez Percé war progressed, praised the military tactics and combat skills demonstrated by the overmatched Joseph and his warriors. Theirs was one of the most gallant and stubborn fights in the history of the Indian wars, the newspaper noted. As usual, it praised the army troops responsible for bringing the campaign to a successful conclusion; and in the

Nez Percés, it suggested, they were "met with an energy as tireless, and a bravery even more desperate, than their own." The Indians had inflicted heavy losses on the army before finally giving up. But they were fighting for their homes, the *Times* pointed out, and for what they believed to be their rights.

The *Times* made no bones about its belief that the Nez Percé war never should have been fought. It was "an unpardonable and frightful blunder" and a crime on the part of the government, the *Times* said in an October editorial. The victims, it said, were both the gallant officers and men of the army and "the peaceful bands who were goaded by injustice and wrong to the war path." The editorial expressed regret that immediate responsibility for the war could not be fixed. But as so often was the case in conflicts with the Native Americans, that responsibility was too obscurely distributed to allow anyone to be brought to account at the bar of public opinion. This facet of the Indian problem never seemed to change.

Sitting Bull, now in self-imposed exile in Canada, continued to draw the attention of the press. In the first ninety days of 1878, the venerable Sioux leader commanded no fewer than ten stories in the *Times*, most of them on the front page. But on the editorial pages, the newspaper was focusing more sharply on fraud and mismanagement at various levels within the government Indian service. A January editorial called attention to a scathing report generated by an investigation into activities in the Indian Office of the Interior Department. In April, the *Times* questioned why the tribes in the Indian Territory needed to maintain an expensive delegation in Washington to protect their interests. There would be little surprise, it concluded, if time should prove that "certain enterprising white men" were interested in keeping control of a large slice of the tribes' revenues in Washington.

The *Times* at this point finally had come to the position that the needs of the Native American cultures and the demands of encroaching white civilization might be irreconcilable. Citing the recent Bannock uprising in the Northwest, it suggested that the troubles went beyond the unfulfilled treaties, broken promises, agency frauds, and threatened coercion that had led to so many difficulties with various tribes in the past. Otherwise, it said, conflict still might be avoided. But the current problems in Idaho, Montana, and Oregon seemed to *Times* editorial writers to lie deeper; the Indians at last had been driven to the wall by the advancing tide of white civilization. The writers saw an irrepressible conflict between the roving way

of life preferred by the Native Americans and the "prescribed bounds" essential to the whites' society—a conflict that in the end the Native Americans were destined to lose. And while the *Times* did not question the Indians' commitment to the justness of their cause, nor their willingness to fight for it, the newspaper now asserted that it would be "but a slender favor" to attempt to preserve the Indian way of life any longer. Henceforth, it would self-deny from its conviction that it was in the best interests of the Native Americans to bring them into the national fold as participating citizens.

The *Times* had persisted for some time in the belief that it was illogical to sign treaties with the various tribes, thus treating them as foreign nations. But it generally had embraced the idea of segregating the Indians on reservations and preserving these from white invasion. Now it would move more consistently toward a position that favored the ultimate breakup of tribal organizations and promoted individual land ownership among Native Americans instead of tribal lands held in common. Like white squatters, the *Times* asserted, Indians who proved to be successful landholders could and should be good citizens. The alternative, continuing to place the Native Americans on reservations and supplying them with government rations, it said, would institutionalize their pauperization and make them permanent wards of the nation.

But in the meantime, the *Times* would continue to emblazon its editorial pages with outrage over the injustices it had come to expect as part of the Indian problem. Never did there seem to be a shortage of topics. One long-running case followed closely by the *Times* was that of the Poncas, who had been forced to move from their reservation in the Dakota Territory in 1876 to the Indian Territory in the Southwest. The relocation had deadly effects on the Poncas, who, the *Times* asserted later, "sickened and died like pestilence-stricken sheep." After their pleas to Washington went unheeded, a number of Poncas deserted the territory and struggled back to their homeland—only to be taken prisoners by the army.

Thanks in part to *Times* reporting, the Ponca case drew a great deal of national attention. A number of people helped raise funds to pay for legal assistance, and when a federal judge eventually ruled in the Poncas' favor, the Indians gained new standing in court. But the situation never would have developed in the first place, a *Times* editorial implied in December 1879, had it not been for "the evil genius which is forever stirring up the never-settled question of the relation of the red man to the Government of the United States. . . ."

The *Times* treated with similar gravity the situation of the Utes in Colorado. That tribe, following a stubborn dispute over government efforts to force it to replace its traditional hunting culture with agriculture, rebelled at last and had to be overcome by military force. Here, again, stated a *Times* editorial, was an inevitable collision between the Native American way of life and white civilization. "Nobody appears to have known how deep in the Indian breast was the hostility to the so-called improvements of the white man," it said. But from the outset, it argued, the Utes' struggle was futile. They were no match for the power of the United States government; nothing but certain overthrow awaited them. "Perhaps this is destiny," the *Times* editorial concluded, "as hurried on by the American people. But it is impossible not to feel at least a passing pang of commiseration for a tribe thus systematically improved off the face of the earth."

Overall, the magnitude of the Indian problem appeared to be undiminished—at least as measured by attention from the *Times*. More than four dozen stories on the Indians appeared in the news columns of the paper through the first six months of 1880, and there were nearly a hundred stories during the remainder of the year. The ubiquitous Siting Bull was the subject of a number of these between mid-September and the end of the year. In the Southwest, a small Apache band under Victorio was proving to be a serious headache for the army. Victorio soon met his death. The *Times* extended no sympathy over his loss. But, stating a position now familiar to readers, it noted that "ordinarily competent and honest management" on the part of white authorities could have prevented his taking to the warpath to begin with.

It was another Apache leader, Geronimo, for whom the *Times* saved its true wrath. Next to Siting Bull, Geronimo, among all the native chiefs, was the target of the newspaper's most ardent vilification. He and his warriors were front-page news in the *Times* through much of 1885 and into early 1886. Geronimo's trail, an early 1885 editorial lamented, was marked by the "mutilated bodies" of his victims. The editorial suggested that if any of his small band escaped the soldier's rifles, "we do not see why those who may survive should not be hanged." Even as they expressed their outrage, however, the *Times* editorial writers were careful not to paint all the Apaches with the same brush. They assured readers that there were thousands of Apaches who remained peaceful and "who know that Geronimo's deeds only deepen the settler's hate for every being that has copper-colored skin." Following Geronimo's eventual capture, the *Times* supported the decision to imprison

him rather than put him to death as had been demanded by many on the Southwest frontier. Just to be rid of Geronimo and his followers, it said, was what mattered to the settlers in the long run.

Close after Geronimo's capture and imprisonment came the death of Sitting Bull in 1890. Insofar as the Indian problem was concerned, the open conflict era was virtually ended. The Native Americans, as the *Times* had pointed out more than a decade earlier, had been in a losing struggle against the overwhelming forces of white civilization. Now they were very much at the mercy of a national government they had opposed but whose protection was their best hope. It would be their lot, during the last decade of the nineteenth century, to watch helplessly as much of their remaining land was divided among white settlers and to face renewed efforts to force them to give up the final vestiges of their ancient cultures.

The most savage scenes of Indian warfare, the *Times* pointed out, now might be seen in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. And Indian warriors now would wear the uniforms of the United States Army. But the *Times* never lost sight of the fact that the Native Americans had made vital contributions. The Iroquois League, it pointed out in an 1893 editorial, predated European settlement of the North American continent. With no model to follow, the Iroquois had created a formidable federal system—an ancient federation that endured for perhaps five hundred years—"out of their own minds and experience," it said.

The Indian problem had not disappeared. The nature of issues had changed, in some ways becoming more complex, but more than a century of strife had left a bitter divide. The *Times* now turned its editorial sights on conditions surrounding the transition of the Native Americans into the white world, under the whites' conditions. Insistent and mundane matters such as the Indian Bureau's authority to prohibit the sale of beer on the reservations gained passing attention by the *Times*. But the *Times* editorial writers were more concerned about vital issues such as Indian education. They strongly endorsed schools on the reservations as an alternative to forcing Indian children to be removed to distant institutions. They were alert to continued graft, corruption, and incompetence in the government Indian service. They argued the advantages of training in trades and industry for the Indians, as a means to the "throwing down of reservation barriers." The reservation system, the *Times* now insisted, restricted the Indians' progress to full participation as citizens.

The *Times* warned against the false economy of a move to eliminate the long-standing Board of Indian Commissioners. The knowledge and vigilance of the unsalaried commissioners, it said, helped prevent waste and corruption in the Indian service that not only was a fraud on the taxpayers but also could be cited as a direct cause of much of the bloodshed of the past.

White civilization, the *Times* continued to point out, came at a high price to the Native Americans. In the spring of 1897, it detailed action by which Coconino County, Arizona, authorities drove out sixteen peaceful Navajo families through an outrageous demand that they pay an exorbitant tax on their livestock or flee the county. "The whole business," stated a *Times* editorial, "was in the whites an outbreak of savage envy and hatred." It called on the federal government to investigate "an outrage so cruel and contemptible" and to protect the Indians by all necessary force. Clearly, in the eyes of the *Times*, the Indian problem remained a serious issue on the national agenda.

At about that same time, the newspaper paused to pay a closing tribute to Chief Joseph of the Nez Percés. Joseph was making his first trip to the East, where, among other things, he would appear in New York's Grant Day parade. The *Times* deemed it an honor to welcome the chief who, twenty years earlier, "was so determined and so fair a fighter" and who had kept his pledge to fight no more. In Joseph it also saw a somewhat melancholy end to the Native American image it had endeavored to make familiar to its readers during the past half-century. "The American bison," said the poignant *Times* editorial, "is scarcely more completely extinct than the savage, unspoiled by civilization, of which the chief of the Nez Percés is a very typical specimen."

At the turn of the century, the *Times* had come full circle in its philosophy concerning the Native American as ward of the nation. The Indian problem, to the *Times*, now manifested itself through innumerable barriers to full Indian participation in national life as citizens. It continued to assail the policy of government handouts that it believed promoted Indian pauperism and complained in a November 1900 editorial that annuities were an obstacle to civilizing the Indians and should be ended. But the editorial writer qualified this hard position with a familiar disclaimer: "As we are responsible for having brought the Indian to his present condition, any plan of reformation that is to be adopted ought to be tempered with mercy and persisted in with firmness and common sense."

The *Times* editorials during this entire period were written anonymously—like those in most newspapers then, as now. There is no sure way to know who penned those most impassioned pleas for justice and humanity toward the Native Americans, those thoughtful expositions on national policy gone awry, or those occasional ugly attacks on the Indian character. However, a newspaper's editorial policy is set by its management. Throughout the decades during which the Indian problem was a matter of high priority, the *Times* management enjoyed reasonable continuity. The scholarly Henry J. Raymond, who established the newspaper in 1851, continued as publisher until his death in 1869. Under his leadership, the *Times* early on gained a solid reputation for accurate and fair news reporting and for editorials of insight. George Jones, Raymond's business partner, took over the newspaper after Raymond's death. Jones relied heavily on his editor, Louis J. Jennings, and assistant editor John Foord. John C. Reid served as managing editor from 1872 until 1889.

After George Jones died in 1891, the *Times* was bought from his family by a group headed by Charles R. Miller and Edward Cary. Both were old hands at the *Times*, Miller having been editor since 1883 and Cary having worked for Jones as associate editor. This team managed the newspaper until 1896, when Tennessee publisher Adolph S. Ochs scraped together a business deal that permitted him to buy the *Times*. Ochs immediately named Henry Loewenthal, a staff veteran, as his managing editor.

These were the men who set the course of the *Times* during the decades under consideration. The newspaper's influence as an opinion leader varied immensely at times during that period, and its circulation was a good deal smaller than that of some of its more colorful rival publications. But there was never a point between 1860 and 1900 at which the *Times* failed to serve as an important source of information and opinion for a significant segment of the public and a forum for the discussion of important questions. Then, as now, what the *Times* reported and what editorial positions it took mattered a great deal to many among the best-informed.

The latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly after the end of the Civil War, was a period of rapid national expansion. Settlers on the ever-moving frontier may have faced regular and frequent reminders of the native tribes they sought to replace on the vast territories, but the distant conflicts to the west could easily have gone unnoticed by their compatriots in the East—on the whole, little affected by the Indian problem. But this was a

struggle the *Times* would not let them ignore. Treatment of the Native Americans, in the eyes of the *Times*, became a matter of national honor. Injustices on some distant frontier, remote and otherwise unknown to readers in New York, were brought home to them regularly through the news and editorial pages of the *Times*.

From 1860 through 1900, the *Times* ran nearly one thousand editorials on topics related to the Native Americans. Although the newspaper's general editorial position at times was inconsistent, many of its editorials were masterfully crafted and written with power and passion. *Times* editorial writers kept the subject alive, focusing on topics as narrow as minor frontier incidents or as broad as failed national policy. The questions to which the *Times* sought answers were persistent ones; in its columns, such questions would not be allowed simply to go away without explanation. If the Indian problem would not go away, neither would the attention paid it by the *Times*.

Such attention was manifest in the paper's news columns, of course. But it was reflected most vividly on the *Times* editorial pages. Through the editorial columns, particularly as viewed over a period of years, readers were reminded of the magnitude, complexity, and difficulty of issues that collectively constituted the Indian problem.

Editorializing “the Indian Problem”

The New York Times
on Native Americans,
1860–1900

Robert Hays

With a foreword by Paul Simon

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