



Sauk Chief Makataimeshekiakiah, Black Hawk, 1837 – Painting by Charles Bird King, public domain, Wikimedia

I surveyed the country that had cost us so much trouble, anxiety and blood, and that now caused me to be a prisoner of war. I reflected upon the ingratitude of the whites when I saw their fine houses, rich harvests and everything desirable around them; and recollected that all this land had been ours, for which I and my people had never received a dollar, and that the whites were not satisfied until they took our village and our graveyards from us and removed us across the Mississippi. — Black Hawk

Giovanni

The white men do not scalp the head; but they do worse

— they poison the heart.

— Black Hawk

When Céline didn't come back, I went looking for her. I couldn't find her. She walked out without a word.

After rehearsal I sat down with Les. "Love is a narcotic," he said. "It can take over your life just like heroin. I'm a past expert on both. I knew in my heart Annabella had the devil in her, but I was young and thought I had all the answers and married her anyway. When you hook up with a girl who's unhappy, you're going to kill yourself trying to make her happy. It just can't be done. I got the scars to prove it. She had no idea what she wanted. After six months, she ran off with a guitar player. When that went to hell, after a few months she came back. Then one night, she took off again and didn't come back. I went downhill. It took several years to get over that.

"I can see why you've fallen for Céline. She's as fine as peach wine in the summertime. She's put the hoo doo, voo doo on you. She's crazy about you right now, but what happens down the road? She's eighteen. She may wake up one day and discover you're not the only man in town. Where'll you be then? She needs time to grow. When you're that age, you need your freedom. You got to be free to make your own choices, even if they're wrong.

"Freedom is a big issue with me. That's why I'm in Paris. Freedom. I got here what I don't have in the states. When I was eighteen, I took a bus down to New Orleans to hear the music down there. They had a drinking fountain on Canal Street for whites and a drinking fountain for colored. I was not going to let anybody tell me where to drink. I drank from the white man's fountain. A man in a straw hat started hollering at me but I just kept on drinking. 'Hey nigger,' he yelled, 'get to the colored fountain.' When he slapped me upside the head, I shoved him in the chest and kicked his feet right out from under him. He hit his head on the floor and

went out like a light. I stepped on his hat and walked away with my head held high, too proud to run. That was a mistake — not running. They caught me and beat the crap out of me. I still have the scar under my eye. I spent six months in the New Orleans jail. I also had to pay for the hat.

“I’ll tell you why black artists come to France. The other night over a few scotches at Le Lapin Agile, Claude Romain was telling me stories about Joséphine Baker. I was surprised that the French know more about Joséphine than Americans do.



Josephine Baker in the Folies Bergère production *Un Vent de Folie*, 1927 – Photograph by Walery, public domain, Wikimedia

“Her comical and unpredictable moves enchanted the crowd. Then in the twenties arriving in Paris in *La Revue Nègre*, Claude said her erotic dancing created a sensation at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. She could do nothing wrong after that. Dancing nearly naked in her banana skirt, Joséphine became a star at the Folies Bergères. When she sang “J’ai deux amours,” written by Géo Koger and Henri Varna, it became a smash hit. ‘*Mon pays et Paris par eux toujours, mon cœur est ravi.*’ The sophisticates of café society believed that Joséphine was the apotheosis of Henri Rousseau’s paintings, *The Dream* and *The Snake Charmer* and the incarnation of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ‘Noble Savage,’ although in fact, Rousseau never used that term. The poet Anna de Noailles described her as ‘a pantheress with golden claws.’ The rage of Paris — suddenly there were Joséphine Baker dolls, costumes, and perfumes, women slicking their hair down like the African American seductress, the darling of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso, and Langston Hughes.

“When the war broke out, her café-society fame gave Joséphine access to embassy parties where she could chat with Japanese, Germans, Italians, Hungarians, and Russian diplomats. Her evenings at the men’s clubs gave her the idea to pick up secrets for France, so Joséphine volunteered to be a spy. Since they didn’t strip search celebrities, she hid her secrets inside her panties. When people were in danger of being picked up by the Nazis, she got visas and passports through her diplomatic connections and helped them to escape from France. Claude told stories of how she traveled to non-aligned countries like Portugal and Spain, writing down secrets in invisible ink on her sheet music. Fortunately, Joséphine was never caught by the Germans and was not accused of being a double agent for the Germans as the French had prosecuted Mata Hari for espionage in the First World War.”

“What happened to Mata Hari?”

“She was put on trial for being a German spy, but her trial consisted of only circumstantial evidence and hearsay. After her father went bankrupt in the Netherlands and her mother died leaving her with no means of support at the age of 15, she responded to a newspaper ad and married at 18 to an alcoholic officer in the Dutch East Indies, suffering nine years of abuse until she escaped to Paris where a diplomat lover encouraged her to become an exotic dancer. With her experience in Indonesia studying native dance, she billed herself as a Javanese princess of priestly birth. Casting off her transparent veils until she was nearly naked, Mata Hari quickly gained notoriety and the favors of a millionaire industrialist. Her success elevated nude dancing to a

more respectable status for erotic dancing in Paul Derval's Folies Bergères where Joséphine Baker made a big splash during the '20s and '30s. Taking advantage of her provocative allure, Mata Hari slept with French and German officers and politicians, taking money from all of them.”

“What was the evidence against her?”

“Other than some of her sexual liaisons, there was no hard evidence of her passing any military secrets. In fact, it's believed that the Germans wrote her off as producing nothing of interest. Because the Germans saw no advantage of keeping her on the payroll, it's possible that the German military attaché in Madrid sent a phony message which they knew would be decoded, setting up her arrest at the Hotel Elysées Palace in Paris. The French Military created a cause célèbre by trying Mata Hari for espionage. Her real crime was her phenomenal success as an exotic stripper that triggered a puritanical public reaction against a courtesan who was careless about how she earned her money.”



Mata Hari, 1915 – Author, Jacob Merkelbach, source, Universiteit Leiden, public domain, Wikimedia

“By prosecuting Mata Hari for espionage,” I said, “the military was looking for a distraction from their failures on the Western Front.”



Margaretha Zelle, stage name, Mata Hari, Dutch exotic dancer and courtesan took the stage name of Mata Hari, meaning in Malay “Eye of the day.” – Unknown author, source, nationalgeographic.com, public domain, Wikimedia

“That was it, a hysterical French press provided the people with a scapegoat for France’s military failures. Her lawyer wasn’t even allowed to cross examine any of her accusers. The President of France refused Mata Hari clemency and at dawn she was taken to the barracks at the Château de Vincennes to be executed by firing squad. She refused a blind fold and the French officer gave the command with his saber and twelve Zouaves shot her to death. An officer approached her crumpled body and shot her at close range in the temple to assure her death.”

“I can see they convicted Mata Hari with little evidence — a trial and verdict in the court of public opinion. Since Joséphine had contacts with both Allied and Nazi diplomats in Spain, how did she avoid being accused of being a double agent?”

“Joséphine didn’t make the mistake of sleeping with Germans for one thing. When the Nazis goose stepped into Paris, she moved to Morocco and entertained Allied soldiers in North Africa. Claude said after the American soldiers liberated the inmates of Buchenwald, Joséphine gave a show for the inmates who were so weak they couldn’t be moved. Grateful for her work in the resistance, France awarded Joséphine the Croix de Guerre and the Rosette de la Résistance. General Charles de Gaulle made her a Chevalier du Légion d’honneur. But when she came back to New York, the Stork Club refused to serve her.



Stork Club, November 1944. Orson Welles at left with cigar – Photography by Alfred Eisenstaedt, *Life Magazine*, Public domain, Wikimedia

“In the year of the market crash, the Stork Club was opened by a bootlegger from Enid, Oklahoma with the backing of two Oklahoma gamblers. It became the watering hole for aristocrats, movie stars, millionaires, and showgirls, New York City’s café society mix of glamour, money, and power. In 1951, when Joséphine was left waiting at the Stork Club for an hour for her dinner, Grace Kelly saw what was coming down. She went over to Joséphine and they walked arm in arm out of the Stork Club. In the papers, Joséphine took on gossip columnist Walter Winchell who used the club as a source for his columns but had never questioned their policy of racial discrimination. Winchell, a friend of J. Edgar Hoover and a supporter of Senator McCarthy’s red scare, was a feared man for his columns were read daily by 50 million people. When challenged, Winchell was famous for going for blood. He retaliated by calling Joséphine a communist. Being called a communist was deadly in 1951 and was probably the reason that the U.S. government didn’t renew her visa. However, it didn’t do any good for the Stork Club. If you own a posh joint, you don’t want Grace Kelly walking out. Grace and Joséphine were close friends after that.”

“Claude told me stories about Joséphine,” I said. “After losing her only child in childbirth, she adopted twelve kids from all over the world, Finland, France, Morocco, Algeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Israel, Korea, Japan, Colombia, and Venezuela. She put her ‘Rainbow Tribe’ up in a chateau in the Dordogne.”



Josephine Baker and her 10 adopted children in the tour boat, *President John F. Kennedy*, Amsterdam, the Netherlands – Photograph by Hugo van Gelderen, National Archives, Netherlands, Wikimedia



Château des Milandes which Joséphine rented for her family in 1940 and purchased in 1947 – Photograph by Bthv, Wikimedia

“Yeah,” Les laughed. “Joséphine was eccentric all right. She had a pet cheetah which terrorized the musicians.”

“Claude told me,” I laughed, “she had a chimpanzee, a pig, and a goat.”

“After her banana skirt fame, Joséphine made several films,” Les continued, “*Zouzou* and *Princess Tam Tam*. Hemingway called her the most sensational woman he’d ever seen. But no one in America saw her films. When she came back to America in the thirties to star in the *Ziegfeld Follies*, she was replaced. She was called a Negro wench by the *New York Times*. Heartbroken, she went back to Paris, gave up her American citizenship and became a citizen of France. Joséphine was honored in France and dishonored in America.



Josephine Baker, Havana, Cuba, 1950 – Photo by Rudolf Suroch, public domain, Wikimedia

“That’s why American black artists stay in France. With her magnificent dark body, Joséphine proved that black was beautiful.”

Les paused to polish his rimless eyeglasses with his scarlet silk handkerchief. He put them back on and said, “Despite Joséphine great success, the French are also guilty of abuse of blacks especially in the African colonies. I read Rene Maran’s *Batouala*, the first novel by a black to be awarded the Prix Goncourt. An Afro-Frenchman born in Martinique, Maran was one of the first blacks to be an administrator in French Equatorial Africa. *Batouala* captures the exotic flavor of the African continent and the lives of African people better than anyone of his generation.

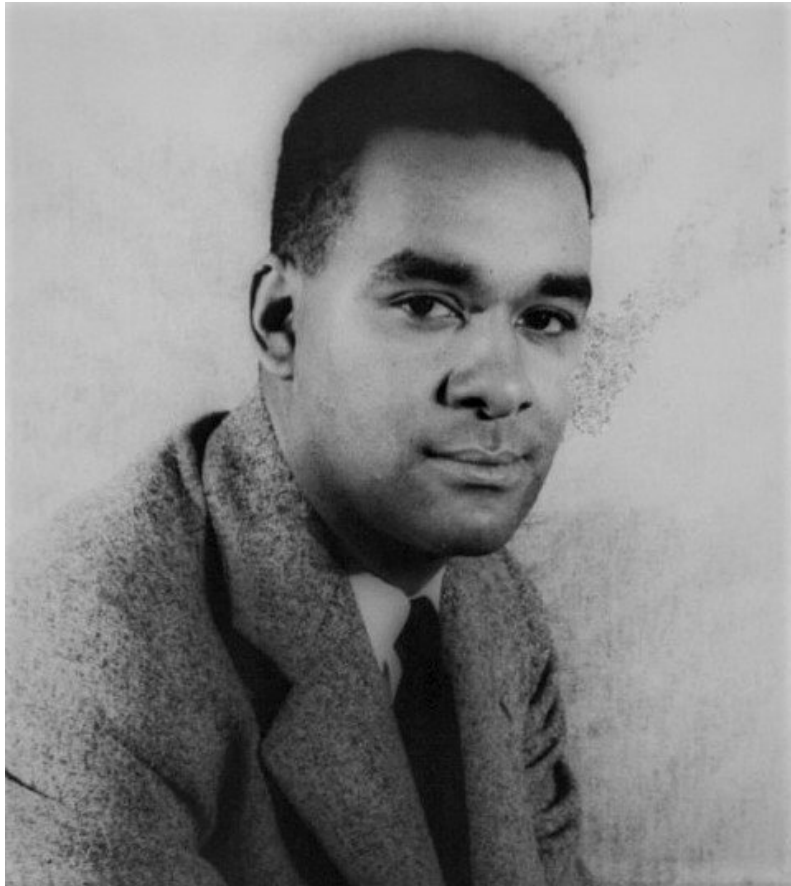


French author René Maran, 1930, winner of the French Prix Goncourt for *Batouala* in 1921 – Photograph by Agence de presse Meurisse, Bibliothèque national de France, [Wikimedia](#)

“Maran struggled his whole life with racism. He became disillusioned with the burden that French colonialism laid upon the African people. One night when James Baldwin and I talked ‘til dawn, he told me that Maran not only brought to light the exploitation of the French ‘civilizing mission’ in Africa, he also did much to popularize the Harlem Renaissance in France. But not much has changed in France since the 1920s. While black jazz musicians are stars in Paris, Africans are still second-class citizens in Africa and France. The only place where there’s been even halfway decent relations between the races is in the realm of music. Nowhere else but singing, dancing, and music.”

“Being a practicing preacher when he was a kid, James Baldwin knew how words have the power to move us. He said, ‘The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer.’ Baudelaire said to handle a language skillfully is to practice a kind of evocative sorcery. Martin Luther King understands that too. Besides James Baldwin, there are a lot of expats in France, black writers who came over to be free of the shit a black man goes through in the states.

“Richard Wright, a black writer from Mississippi, has taken up French citizenship. He’s given Sartre and Camus a clear picture of what race relations are like back in the U.S. Wright says you can’t go home again. He’s never going back to Mississippi. If you want to know what a black man’s life is really like, I’m going to give you a copy of Wright’s *Native Son* and John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom, A History of American Negroes*. Those books will open your eyes.”



Richard Wright, 1939, author of *Native Son* – Photograph by Carl Van Vechten, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“Yvonne told me about John Hope Franklin. Franklin had Indian ancestors.”

“Yvonne was right, Franklin’s papa, Buck Colbert Franklin, was of Choctaw and African American ancestry. Born in the Chickasaw Nation in the western part of Oklahoma Indian Territory, Buck Franklin became a lawyer and was renowned for defending the black survivors of the 1921 race massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma. John Hope graduated from Brooker T. Washington high school in Tulsa. The killings left a mark on him like it has on me.”

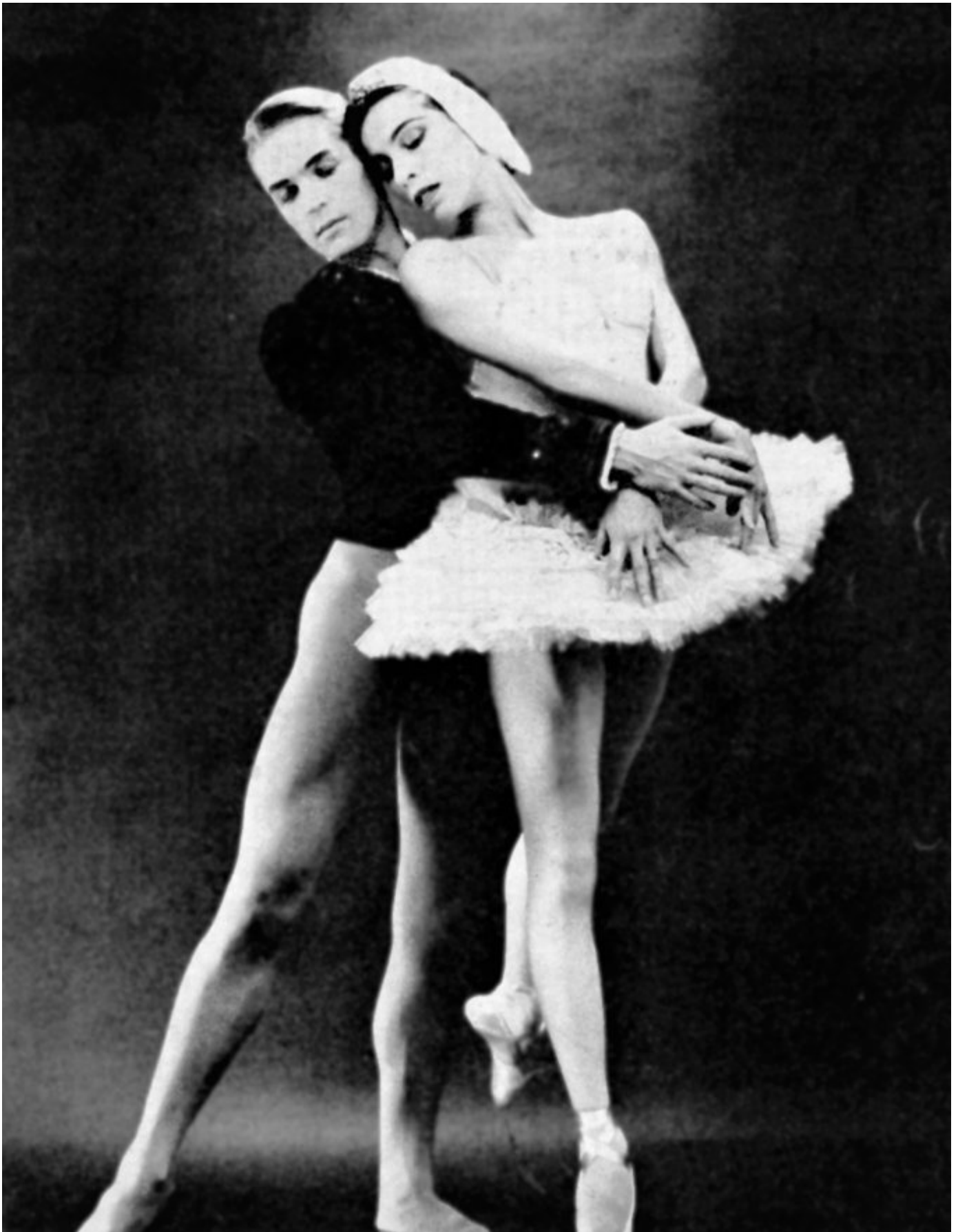
“A race massacre in Tulsa?”

“Yeah, in Tulsa. Gio, you’re a real fine man. But the killings in Tulsa and so many memories make it real hard to be friends with white folk back in the states. My auntie Mae was murdered in the Tulsa killings. Mama told me what went down that day. She wanted all of us to know the true story. She said it was no riot. It was a goddamn massacre. Genocide. But this country has a long experience with genocide, not only towards blacks, but towards American Indians too. You’ve told me your interest in American Indians, and I grant you there is a romantic side to it, but if you’re going to be an American citizen, you need to learn the good and the bad of it. As a black man there’s a reason I care about Indians. I have Osage blood on my mother’s side and like blues guitarist T-Bone Walker, Cherokee on my father’s side. You can see a little of the Indian blood in my nose and the color of my skin.

“Céline told me that Maria Tallchief, the prima ballerina of the New York City Ballet, is Osage from Fairfax, Oklahoma. Her family name is Ki He Kah Stah Tsa.”



American ballerina, Maria Tallchief, 1954 – Unknown author, cover of *Dance Magazine*, Wikimedia



Maria Tallchief and Erik Bruhn, July 1961 – Unknown author, front cover of *Dance Magazine*, public domain, Wikimedia

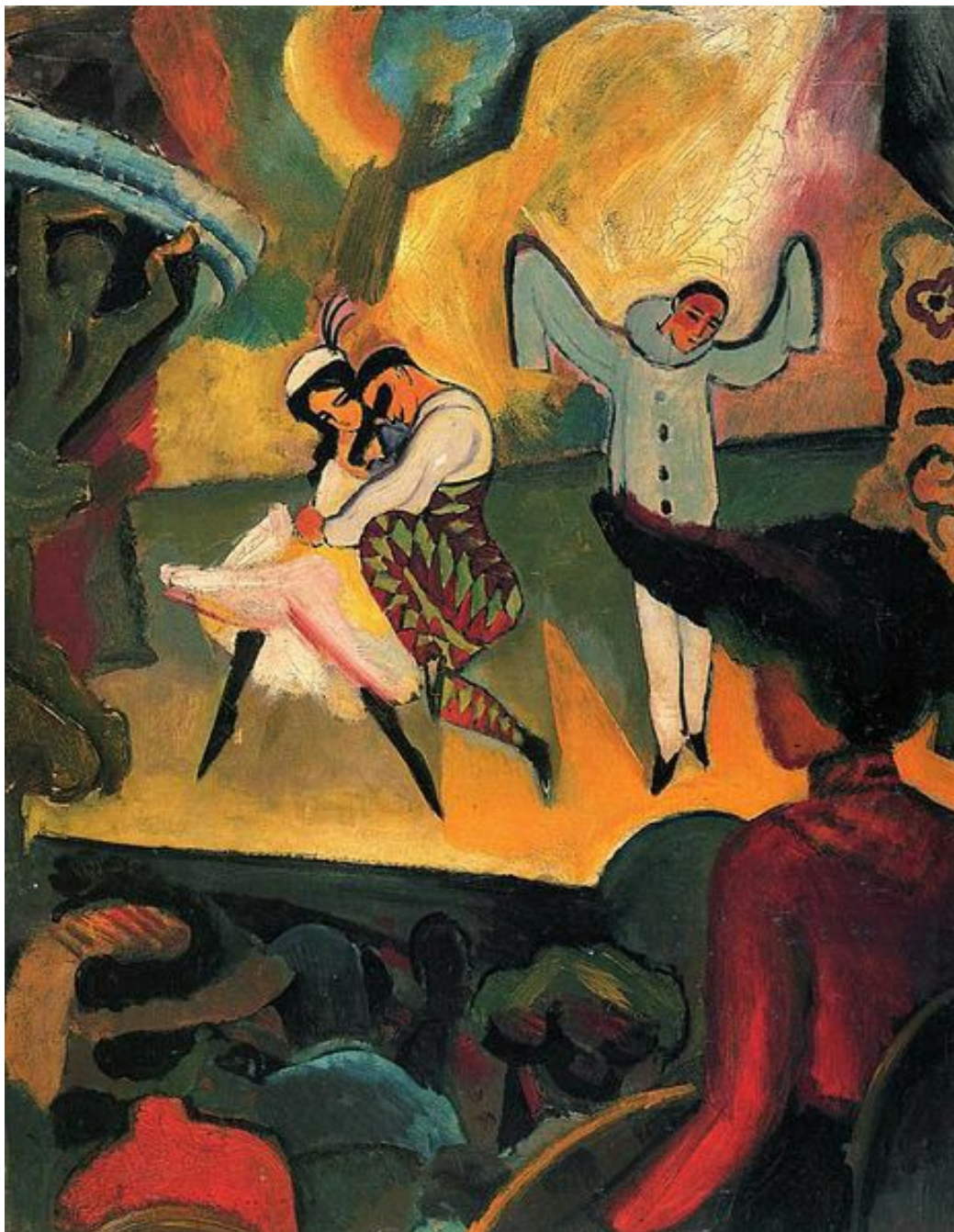
“I’d heard of Balanchine’s ballerina. I didn’t realize she was Osage. There is a black ballerina, Raven Wilkinson, dancing with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo. I first saw Raven dance in the City a couple of years ago. I was talking to Arthur Mitchell, the first African American dancer with Balanchine’s New York City Ballet and we agree that Raven is a lyrical dancer with great depth of feeling. Arthur said it was nearly impossible for a black ballet dancer to be accepted. Raven tried out for the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo three times before they accepted on condition that she not speak about her race. The first black ballerina in a major ballet company, Raven was promoted to soloist after her first year, required to wear white makeup when touring in the Jim Crow South. A year after she began dancing with the Ballets Russes, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation in the *Brown v Board of Education* decision and everything changed in the South. The Court’s decision fired up a resurgence of the war on blacks. When the Ballets Russes was stopped at the border of Alabama for an illegal fruit inspection, the border agent said, ‘You all got a nigger on this bus. Get her off or you can’t come in.’ Raven had to get off the bus right there on the border. When her taxi arrived at the hotel in Atlanta, a manager steeped in the ways of the South thought he’d spotted a high yellow quadroon and ordered a colored taxi to send Raven to a colored motel. Locked in her hotel room for her safety, she looked out the window and saw a cross that the KKK had set aflame. The director sent Raven back to New York. As Raven’s racial identity became public, she was forbidden to dance in Montgomery, Alabama. Arthur said Raven can no longer tour the South. The Ballets Russes told her, ‘We can’t have a black dancer dancing the Swan Queen.’ I told Arthur, when you see Raven, tell her to audition for one of the European ballet companies maybe The Danish Ballet or The Netherlands Ballet. If they don’t let you dance in America, then leave it. Forget about America.” Les drank down a full glass of water, slammed it down with a crack on the table and said, “Does Maria Tallchief have to go through the same shit?”

“Indians get harassed too. When Maria was at Beverly Hills High School, the kids made war whoops when they saw her and asked why she wasn’t wearing feathers.”

“But she could go to school in Beverly Hills,” Les snapped. “Do you think Raven could go to a white school in Atlanta?”

“After being taunted for being a Native America, Maria changed the spelling of her name from two words, to one word, Tallchief. Maria’s papa, Tall Chief, an Osage with land rich in oil deposits, had married Maria’s mother, a beautiful woman of Scottish-Irish blood from Kansas working as a housekeeper on the Osage

reservation. After Maria's family moved to Los Angeles to further her career, at age twelve she began studying with Bronislava Nijinska, the sister of the great Vaslav Nijinsky of the Ballet Russes. Although trained to be a concert pianist, while working with Nijinska, Tallchief became dead serious about ballet. As strict as a Marine drill sergeant, Nijinska was famed for creating *Les Noces* for the Ballet Russes at the Théâtre de la Gaîté in Paris. She also trained Maria's sister, Marjorie Tallchief. Nijinska also trained my favorite Hollywood dancer, Cyd Charisse, the one with the beautiful long legs who was a partner of both Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. Knowing how much I dig Igor Stravinsky's music, Céline took me to a performance of Nijinska's *Les Noces*."



Ballets Russes, 1912 – Painting by August Macke, Kunsthalle Bremen Collection, Public domain, Wikimedia

“You’re right on there,” Les exclaimed, “Stravinsky was a genius of percussive composition.”

“At first, I didn’t understand the significance of Nijinska’s rigid choreography which had shocked audiences of the early 1920’s. Nijinska’s *Les Noces* was one of the first feminist ballets. Rather than creating a stereotypical joyous wedding, by using monochromatic costumes, rigid choreography, and Stravinsky’s percussive music, Nijinska showed the repression of women in Russian culture.”

“Stravinsky,” Les said, “not only influenced ballet, but modern jazz too.”

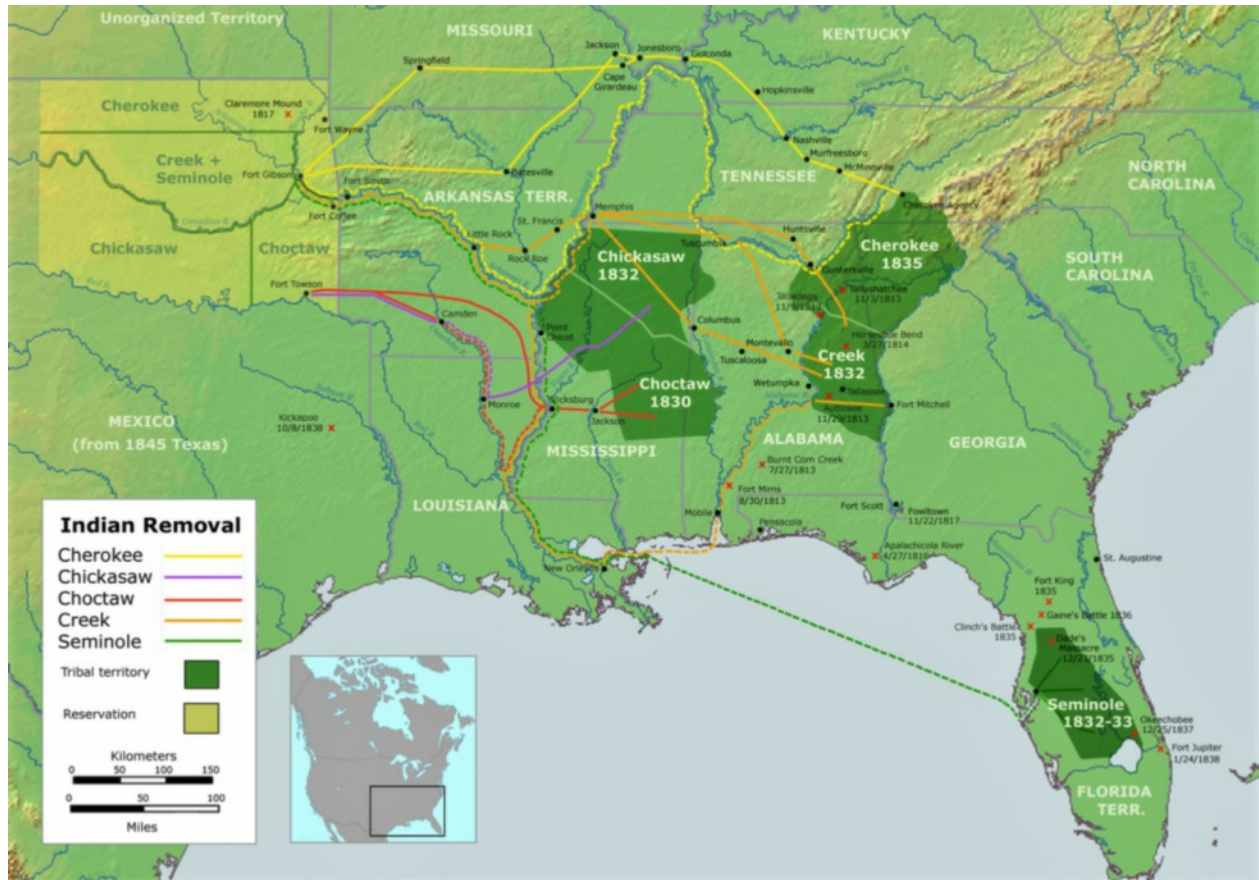
“While studying with Nijinska,” I said, “Tallchief realized that instead of becoming a concert pianist, she had the passion to dedicate the rest of her life to ballet. She chose dance because the music was growing inside of her, her hands and legs the instruments. Céline said if Maria had chosen the piano, she’d have the music but not the dance. By choosing dance, she had both. Céline feels the same way as Maria, by interpreting the instruments of the orchestra, a dancer visually expresses the heart and soul of the composer. Tallchief’s family let her abandon the piano for dance and at the age of twelve, she began her transformation from a caterpillar into a miraculous butterfly. Famed for her musicality and *port de bras*, Tallchief broke through the barriers for Native American women. She was the first American dancer to perform with the Paris Opera Ballet and Moscow’s Bolshoi.”

“What does *port de bras* mean?”

“In French, it means ‘carriage of the arms.’ It’s how a dancer moves her arms and wrists from one position to the next. During the time Tallchief was Balanchine’s muse, he molded the fluidity for which she became famed. No other dancer has equaled Tallchief’s electrifying role in the *Firebird*, a ballet which Balanchine created on her. In her *Firebird* debut, her precision, speed, and radiance astonished the audience and the critics. From the moment she danced the *Firebird*, Maria became America’s prima ballerina, creating the first big success for Balanchine’s New York City Ballet. When you think of the great ballerinas of our time, for Russian ballet, it is Galina Ulanova, for English ballet, it is Margot Fonteyn, and for American ballet, it is Maria Tallchief. Maria challenged the stereotypes of Native Americans.”

“A lot of talent,” Les responded, “has come out of those Oklahoma hills, but most, like the writers of Ireland, have had to leave to achieve greatness. Oil wealth doesn’t guarantee open mindedness. In the late 19th century, Oklahoma was a wilderness inhabited by Indians, but most weren’t originally from Oklahoma. By command of Congress and President Jackson, they were brought to Oklahoma by force, exiled from their native

lands to a new home they called a reservation — a reservation for prisoners. On their original fertile lands in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles had established a sophisticated civilization.”



Trail of Tears, route of the Indian Removal under Andrew Jackson and Martin van Buren, 1836 – 1839
 – Author, Nikater, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C., public domain, Wikimedia

“Andrew Jackson, the hero of the War of 1812,” Les said with a grimace, “didn’t respect that. A land speculator and slave trader, Jackson fought a battle against 1,000 Creeks killing 800 of them. As treaty commissioner, Jackson took away half the land of the Creek nation and seized Creek lands for himself. When I was little, my auntie Selma told me a lot about her people. Her grandpa was full blood Cherokee. She showed me drawings of a Cherokee Council House, a round building of wood beams with tiered seating where all the members held council. They built log cabins with beautiful carpentry. The Cherokee adopted many of the agrarian practices of the whites and prospered, possessing tens of thousands of cattle, a thousand spinning wheels, weaving looms, gristmills, sawmills, cotton gins, schools, and a thousand slaves. They began adopting some of the white folks clothing, combining it with cloth headdresses, plumes, and feathers for dramatic effect. Like black people, the Cherokees were stylish people. In 1827, the Cherokees adopted a constitution like the

the United States with executive, legislative, and judicial branches, a balance of powers. Sequoyah, a Cherokee silversmith and self-taught scholar, invented a system of writing to express the spoken tribal language using 86 symbols to represent all the syllables used in the spoken language. Each symbol for a syllable was taken from letters of the Roman, Cyrillic, and Greek alphabets with Arabic numerals.”



Sequoyah, the inventor of the writing system for the Cherokee language - Copy of a painting by Charles Bird King lost in the 1865 Smithsonian fire – Public domain, Wikimedia

“You mean, a Cherokee silversmith who never went to school just made it up?”

“That’s right, Sequoyah made it up out of symbols rom other languages. At first the Cherokees thought he was crazy. Some believed it was sorcery. When no one wanted to learn it, Sequoyah taught it to his six-year-old daughter who picked it up right quick. He started teaching it to students who proved to the elders that it worked and with the help of missionaries, published the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first Cherokee newspaper. Due to Sequoyah’s syllabary, not long after Jefferson’s death, the Cherokees had attained a higher rate of literacy than the white settlers.”



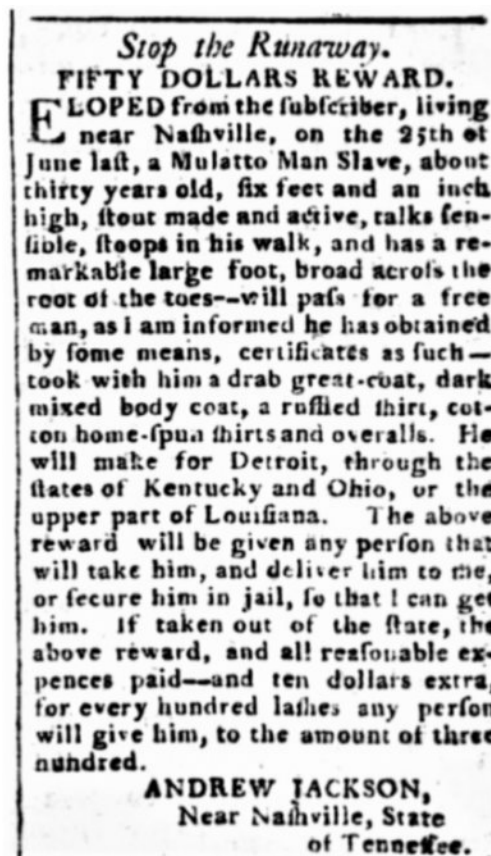
Sequoyah's syllabary in the order that he arranged the characters – Public domain, Wikimedia

“The white folks didn’t dig it. The success of the Cherokee culture was their undoing. Hungry for land, the southern whites coveted the wealth of the Indians and agitated for their removal to the West. The head chief of the Cherokees John Ross led delegations to Washington to protest the brutal treatment by the governmental officials. The son of a Cherokee mother and a Scottish father, bilingual and bicultural, John Ross was the Moses of the Cherokees. Called *Guwisgui*, Little White Bird in Cherokee, Ross petitioned Congress for redress of Cherokee grievances, but his eloquent advocacy for the Cherokees met a stone wall in Washington and he was jailed. Federal treaties were ignored. Georgia forbid Indian testimony in court, proclaiming that tribal government was illegal. In 1829, gold was discovered on Cherokee land in Georgia. The Georgia Gold Rush was the first in U.S. history. Immediately the Georgia government demanded that the feds expel the Cherokee. The state sent their militia onto Cherokee lands, seized the tribal press, and terrorized the native people.

“When the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Cherokees, President Jackson and the state of Georgia ignored the ruling. The freedom to organize and petition, the right to a free press and fair trial, the protection of life, liberty, and property was denied to the Five Civilized Tribes. The Indian lost every right that the Constitution had guaranteed to free men. Over a period of twenty years, whites took over vast areas of Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Mississippi. Notorious for his violent temperament, President Jackson said, ‘Build a fire under them. When it gets hot enough, they’ll go.’

“But,” I protested, “that doesn’t sound like the President Jackson that I’ve read about. Jackson was a Democrat who fought for the common man against the interests of the moneyed class. He refused to renew the charter for the Bank of the United States that James Madison had founded. He called the bank a corrupt monopoly of the rich.”

“Jackson was a democrat only when it came to white people — not for Negroes and Indians. Jackson worked 150 slaves on his 1,000-acre cotton plantation, traded slaves on the Mississippi, denounced abolitionists and posted advertisements to recover runaway slaves.”



Stop the Runaway.
FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD.
ELOPED from the subscriber, living near Nashville, on the 25th of June last, a Mulatto Man Slave, about thirty years old, six feet and an inch high, stout made and active, talks sensible, stoops in his walk, and has a remarkable large foot, broad across the root of the toes--will pass for a free man, as I am informed he has obtained by some means, certificates as such--took with him a drab great-coat, dark mixed body coat, a ruffled shirt, cotton home-spun shirts and overalls. He will make for Detroit, through the states of Kentucky and Ohio, or the upper part of Louisiana. The above reward will be given any person that will take him, and deliver him to me, or secure him in jail, so that I can get him. If taken out of the state, the above reward, and all reasonable expenses paid--and ten dollars extra, for every hundred lashes any person will give him, to the amount of three hundred.
ANDREW JACKSON,
Near Nashville, State
of Tennessee.

Andrew Jackson’s \$50 reward handbill for the return of a slave who escaped from Jackson’s plantation - Tennessee Gazette, October 3, 1804, Public Domain, Wikimedia

“Didn’t George Washington free his slaves upon his death?”

“He only freed part of them. The dowry slaves belonging to his wife, Martha Custis Washington remained enslaved at Mount Vernon. Remember, it was Washington who signed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 that Congress had passed by large majority. One hundred percent of the wealth of these big farmers was built upon the free labor of thousands of men and women. Labor was the source of their wealth. The Fugitive Slave Act set down the way slave holders could recover runaway slaves. It made it a federal crime to help an escaped slave or interfere with capture and permitted slave hunters to pursue escaped slaves in all of U.S. territory. When Washington was serving as President in Philadelphia, one of his slaves, Oney Judge ran away. Martha Washington had told Oney that she was to be given as a wedding present to her granddaughter. Certain she’d die a slave if she returned to Virginia, Oney planned her escape with the help of the free black community of Philadelphia. While her master was eating dinner, she escaped with all her clothes. Washington put out a notice for her capture, offering a ten-dollar reward which is several hundred in today’s money. Notices for her capture were put out to all the ships, but she got away to New Hampshire.”

“Did Washington succeed in catching her?”

“He might have, but it was not the best thing to do considering his public image — the President of the United States, pursuing an enslaved 20-year-old mulatto girl. I’ve heard it said that one of Washington’s friends tried to kidnap her, but she was warned and got away. Oney was some woman. She married a free black seaman, had children and taught herself to read and write. Oney died a free woman. But her sister was given to Martha’s granddaughter as a wedding present and died in slavery.

“If you were a farmer, you weren’t likely to be an abolitionist.”

“You hit the nail on the head. Farming depended on slave labor. General Jackson was a farmer. His wealth was built on land he accumulated and the slaves who worked the land. Jackson believed the Indians and Spaniards were harboring runaway slaves. That’s why he conquered Florida. He despised the Spaniards for stealing American slaves. A man of volcanic passions, Jackson was so drunk at Abraham Lincoln’s second inauguration that he began insulting congressmen and had to be dragged off the stage. In his rages, he’d swear he’d beat his enemies with a cane, cut their throats, and blow them to kingdom come, Jackson possessed a black and white morality, absolutely certain of what he believed was right.

“Denis once told me that Alexis de Tocqueville, the author of *Democracy in America*, believed that

Jackson's violent character and mediocre abilities didn't qualify him for political leadership. Jackson was a populist demagogue loved by white voters who craved Indian land. De Tocqueville said that in America there was little respect for the minority. While he was impressed by a society where social class wasn't an impossible barrier, where the white people shook hands and expected to be treated equally, he observed that a majority of equals could abuse its power and become a tyranny of the majority. And that's what happened with the Indians. Jackson's principles were 'An Eye for an Eye, Toothe for Toothe, and Scalp for Scalp.' When it came to the Indian, Jackson believed in apartheid. Indian culture was inferior to American civilization.

"The Jacksonian era was a time of territorial expansion, governmental corruption, and wild land speculation, a time of naked greed. When gold was discovered on Cherokee land, whites forced Indians to sign leases and by fraud, speculators seized tribal lands of the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations. After being elected president, Jackson reversed the policy of President John Quincy Adams who had refused to remove the Creek Indians. Jackson submitted the Indian removal bill to Congress which passed it into law, giving Jackson and the whites what they had always wanted. During Andrew Jackson's and Van Buren's administration, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 was responsible for driving 50,000 Indians east of the Mississippi from their ancestral homes — land which Black Hawk, the great Sauk leader, said 'had been given



Portrait of Black Hawk from old book – Photograph by Djembayz from display at the U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“When Black Hawk led his tribe across the Mississippi into Illinois to find food, the militia was called out to hunt down Black Hawk’s band. When Black Hawk tried to surrender in 1832, his envoys were shot down and 1,000 Sauk Indians were trapped against the Bad Axe River by soldiers and a U.S. gunboat. Black Hawk’s people were driven into the water at the point of bayonets and slaughtered.”

“They lost their homes. They lost their heritage. They lost everything.”

“There was no one powerful enough to protect them,” Les said with deep regret. “President Jackson’s and Van Buren’s troops herded up the Five Civilized Tribes and removed them to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears. The government sent thousands of soldiers to escort them to Oklahoma. They hardly had time to get a few belongings before they were put on a forced march. The Cherokee homes left behind were plundered and burned. Farms belonging to Cherokees for many generations were taken over by whites in a lottery.



Tah-Chee, a Cherokee Chief, 1837 – Painting by Charles Bird King, public domain, Wikimedia



Elizabeth Brown Stephens, 1903, a Cherokee Indian who walked the Trail of Tears in 1838 – Author Lmaotru, grandmother's photo album, public domain, Wikimedia

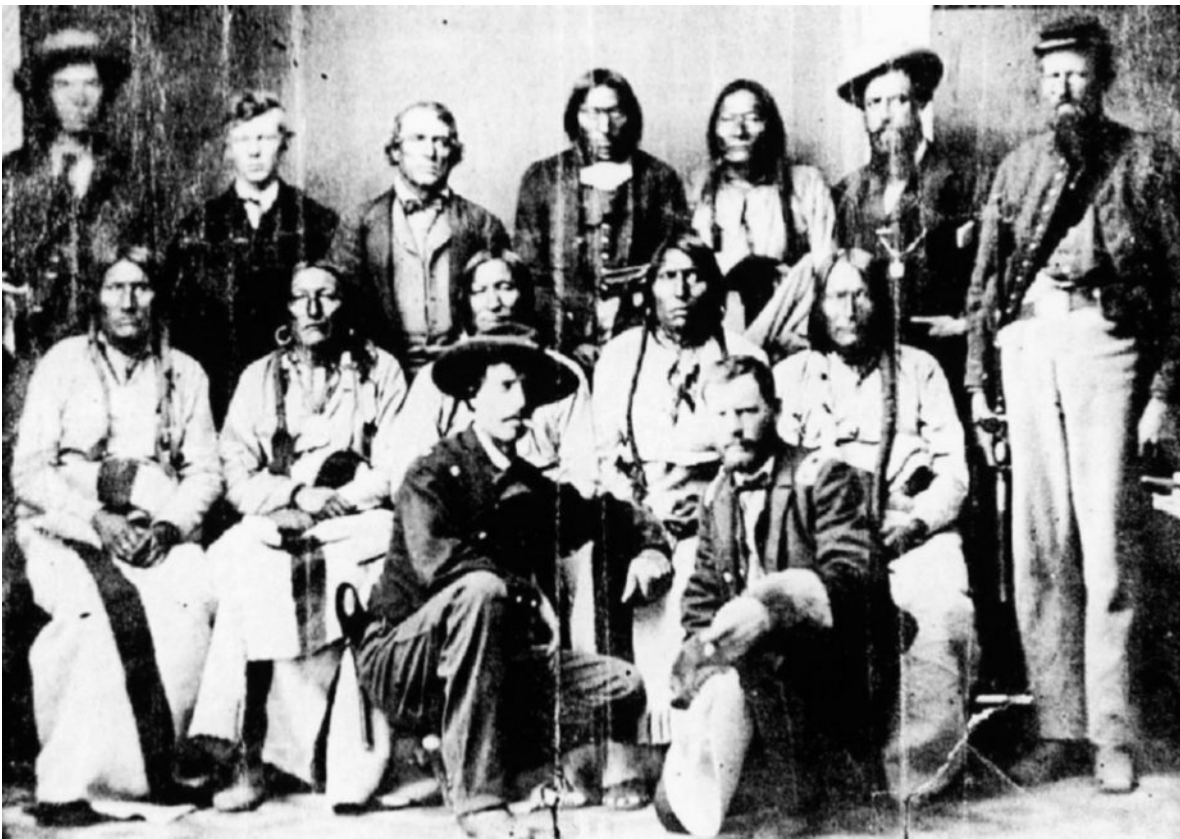
“When you talk about genocide, America has a blood stain that’s never been washed out. Of the 16,000 Cherokees in Georgia, 4,000 died on a forced march in the dead of winter, crossing nine states in bitter cold with ice floes on the rivers they couldn’t cross, huddled for weeks on the banks of the Arkansas River, dying from disease, cold, and hunger. The French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville wrote back to France that he’d seen the expulsion of one of the most noble and ancient American peoples. A soldier who guarded the Indian exiles said long after the Trail of Tears, ‘I fought in the War Between the States, but the Cherokee removal back in 1838 was the cruelest I’ve ever seen.’

“From that point on the Indians had little hope of survival in their traditional lands. Year after year they were ripped off. Jackson’s great adversary, Henry Clay leader of the Whig Party, believed that the full-blooded Indian would never take to civilization. They were destined for extinction.

“The settlers who hated both the Indians and the Feds who made treaties with them, took the law into their own hands. The settlers would make the rules. One of the most sickening mass murders of Indians was the Sand Creek Massacre during the Civil War. In America, violence was a time-honored way of settling differences.”

“There was a war against the Indians during the Civil War?”

“Ever since the first white man arrived, there’s been a war going on against the Indians. It never stopped. For the Indians on the high plains, the seizures had been continuous before the war. In the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, the United States assigned to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, the territory between the North Platte River and the Arkansas River from Kansas to the Rocky Mountains. That encompasses southern Wyoming, western Kansas and Nebraska, and eastern Colorado.



Cheyenne chief Black Kettle assembled with other Cheyenne chiefs on September 28, 1864 in the Camp Weld peace council with Governor Evans and Colonel John M. Chivington, commander of the District of Colorado. Cheyenne chief Black Kettle whose people were murdered in the Sand Creek Massacre by troops of Colonel Chivington is seated in the second row, second from the right. Captain Silas S. Soule, provost marshal, in the first row, kneeling on the right, gave testimony that Colonel Chivington’s killing of the Cheyenne was premeditated, a valiant testimony that motivated one of Chivington’s soldiers to commit an act of vengeance by murdering Silas Soule in Denver. Four years after the Sand Creek Massacre, Colonel George Armstrong Custer’s 7th Cavalry Regiment attacked Chief Black Kettle’s village along the Washita River in western Oklahoma. While trying to cross the Washita River, Black Kettle and his wife were shot in the back and killed. – Unknown author, from Wilbur Sturtevant Nye’s *Plains Indian raiders: the final phases of warfare from the Arkansas to the Red River*, original photographs by William S. Soule, University of Oklahoma Press, 1968, public domain, Wikimedia.

“But the discovery of gold in the Rocky Mountains brought on a horde of settlers and miners in the Pikes Peak Gold Rush. The territorial officials pressured the federal government to negotiate a new Treaty of Fort Wise in which the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes give up their land that had been allotted in the Treaty of Fort Laramie. Chiefs Black Kettle, White Antelope, Lean Bear, Little Wolf, Little Raven, Big Mouth, and Left Hand signed a treaty that squeezed the two nations into one tenth of their former lands, between the Arkansas River and Sand Creek in eastern Colorado.”

Taking out a couple of cigars from his humidor of Honduran mahogany, Les passed one to me saying, “I’ve discovered a hand rolled Puerto Rican cigar that I like. It has a thinly-veined, smooth, supple leaf. Would you like to try it? It’s a slow burner with spicy legero leaves.”

“Indeed, I would. The fragrance of the wrapper is heavenly.”

“Yeah, the dark wrapper gives a hint of sweetness.”

We lit up and smoked in silence for awhile until Les took up his story again.

“Black Kettle and the other mature chiefs of the Council of Forty-Four were trying to live peacefully with the whites. But he was opposed by the young militants, calling themselves the Dog Men, who believed that they could never live in peace with the rapacious white man. Refusing to accept the Council of Forty-Four Chiefs efforts to coexist with the settlers, they raided and burned the white settlements. The Dog Men knew that if they lost control of the migrations of the bisons on the Great Plains, the Cheyenne were finished as a nation.

“When the Denver paper cried for the ‘extermination of the red devils,’ John Chivington, a frontier Methodist minister who’d got himself appointed colonel of the Colorado Cavalry, was raring to get it done. ‘Damn any man who sympathizes with Indians!’ Chivington cried. ‘I’ve come to kill Indians. It is honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians. Kill and scalp them all.’

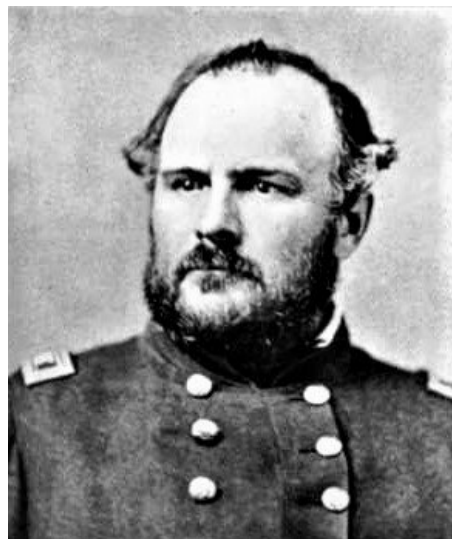
“In accordance with the peace agreement, Southern Cheyenne chief, Black Kettle had settled his band along with a group of Arapahos on Sand Creek. Believing that under the terms of the treaty the camp was under the protection of the commander of Fort Lyon, the warriors went out to hunt buffalo leaving only young boys, women, and men too old to hunt. According to the agreement with the commander of Fort Wise, they flew the American flag over Black Kettle’s lodge as a sign they were under the protection of the federal government.

“When Chivington got a bead on the location of Black Kettle’s camp, he set out with 700 Colorado and



Delegation of Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho chiefs in Denver, Colorado on September 28, 1864. Black Kettle is in the front row, second from left – Photograph by Charles William Carter, public domain, Wikimedia

New Mexico cavalry. It was the militant Dog Men who were doing the raiding and killing, not Black Kettle's peaceful camp, but Chivington decided to attack the easy target of the unsuspecting Cheyenne camp which had been promised the protection of Fort Lyon. Chivington's cavalry attacked with no warning, scattering the women, children, and old men, killing them as they fled. After shooting everyone they could, the Colorado volunteers came back and finished off the wounded, mutilated their bodies, and set fire to the village.

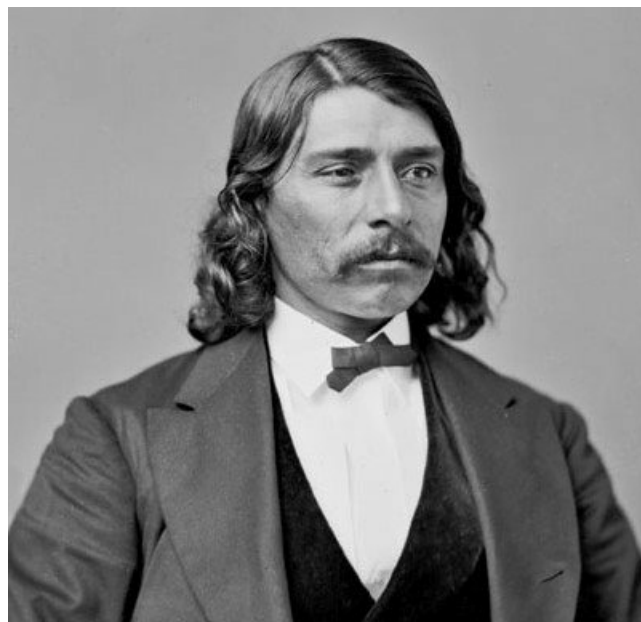


Colonel John Milton Chivington, United States Army, responsible for the Sand Creek Massacre of Cheyenne chief Black Kettle's village, two thirds of whom were women and children, 29 November 1864 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Chivington’s Colorado volunteers returned to Denver hailed as conquerors. But one of Chivington’s officers, Captain Silas Soule who had refused to give the command for his men to fire, came forward to testify that Chivington’s massacre was premeditated. Soule’s honesty cost him his life for after he testified, he was gunned down by one of Chivington’s soldiers. Survivors came forward to bear witness to the carnage. At a Congressional investigation hearing at Fort Riley, Kansas, Edmond Guerrier, a Frenchman survivor of the massacre, verified the carnage.



Captain Silas S. Soule. Despite threats against his life, Captain [Soule](#) testified that Colonel Chivington’s massacre of Black Kettle’s village was premeditated. After his testimony, he was murdered by one of Chivington’s soldiers – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Edmond Guerrier was the son of Frenchman William Guerrier and Walks In Sight, a Cheyenne. Guerrier verified the slaughter at the Sands Creek Massacre to Congressional investigators, Fort Riley, Kansas, 1865 – Photograph by Charles M. Bell, Public domain, Wikimedia

“Sickening. It’s hard to conceive that much hatred of Indians. How did a Frenchman end up in Colorado?”

“Friends in Paris tell me that French fur traders were in North America long before the English or the Americans. Frenchmen immigrated to America to escape a hard situation in France just like I escaped a hard situation in the U.S. After the explorer Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec on the St. Lawrence River in 1608, Frenchmen longing to escape civilization began moving west, surviving by trading with the Indians. Unlicensed by the French Crown, the *coureurs des bois*, the ‘runners of the woods,’ adopted native culture, married Indian women, and lived in peace with the tribes on the plateau.



Arrival of French explorer Samuel de Champlain at future site of Quebec City, 1608 – Painting by George Agnew Reid, public domain, Wikimedia

“When President Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark to explore the Louisiana Purchase, they built Fort Mandan in North Dakota, but were in a dangerous standoff with the Mandan tribe who weren’t too pleased to see white faces invading their land. But the white men got lucky when they made the acquaintance of a French fur trader by the name of Toussaint Charbonneau who was married to Sacagawea, a pretty Shoshone girl. The



French *coureur des bois* and a native American woman, 1858–1860 – Watercolor painting by Alfred Jacob Miller, Waters Art Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Map of Great Lakes Region of Nouvelle France, 1688 – Vincenzo Coronelli, Public domain, National Archives of Canada, Wikimedia

expedition took on Charbonneau as their translator and through his negotiations made friends with the Mandans. Charbonneau, Louis and Clark shared a peace pipe with all the Mandan chiefs.”



Bison-Dance of Mandan Indians in front of their Medicine Lodge in Mih-Tutta-Hankush – Aquatint by Karl Bodmer, public domain, Wikimedia

“Who was this Edmond Guerrier?”

“I came across his name when I was reading about the Indian Wars. Guerrier struck me as a man between two cultures who witnessed the disintegration of his people. His papa William Guerrier was a Frenchman born in St. Louis, his mama Walks In sight, a Cheyenne of the Wutapai band. Born in a Cheyenne camp on the Smokey River in Kansas, Guerrier traded with his papa on the plains of the Upper Platte and Arkansas River. After his papa died, he left school and lived with the Cheyenne who called him Red Tail Hawk. During the Indian Wars, Guerrier became a Cheyenne interpreter for the U.S. government and was nearly killed at Sand Creek. He testified to the Congressional investigators that while Chief Black Kettle was flying the white flag of surrender, Chivington’s Colorado Volunteers murdered in cold blood over one-hundred defenseless women and children and half a hundred old men. Those who’d survived the massacre, testified that the liquored-up volunteers killed unarmed people without reason. They told of the mutilation of corpses, soldiers cutting off fingers and ears for jewelry, blowing out the brains of little kids, cutting off the genitalia of

women. The proud bushwhackers brought the trophies like slain animals to show in the Apollo Theater and saloons of Denver”

“It’s hard to believe,” I said, “cavalry officers slaying unarmed women and little kids.”

“You must remember that a majority of the whites in the West believed the natives should be annihilated. By the time of Sand Creek, there weren’t that many Cheyenne and Arapaho left. During the Gold Rush, emigrants brought in cholera. Spread by the traders, the cholera epidemic hit the Plains Indians in 1849. 2,000 Cheyenne died, maybe two thirds of all the Cheyenne people. They were barely hanging on by the time Chivington wiped them out at Sand Creek. It just goes to show that in a democracy, a majority can perpetrate a blood bath. Chivington never spent a day in jail for killing the defenseless Cheyenne and Arapaho.”

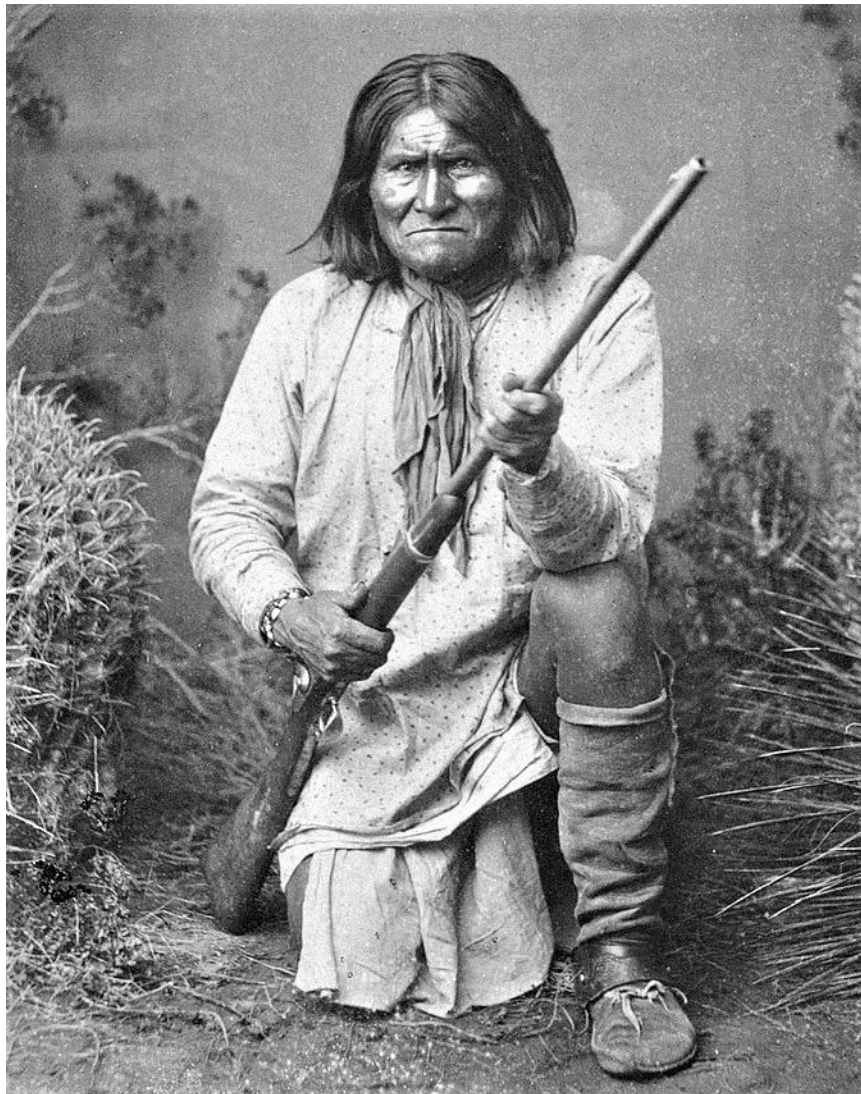
“Did somebody gun Guerrier down too?”

“Guerrier lived a charmed life. He became a successful rancher and died at a ripe old age on his ranch in Oklahoma. But Guerrier’s successful life was rare for the Indian. The Mexicans who controlled Arizona in the mid-19th century, hunted down and killed Apaches, just like Chivington had murdered the Cheyenne, setting a \$25 bounty for the scalp of an Apache child. When Geronimo was in his early twenties, Mexican soldiers attacked his camp while he was away on a trading trip. When Geronimo returned, he found his mother, wife, and three children slain.

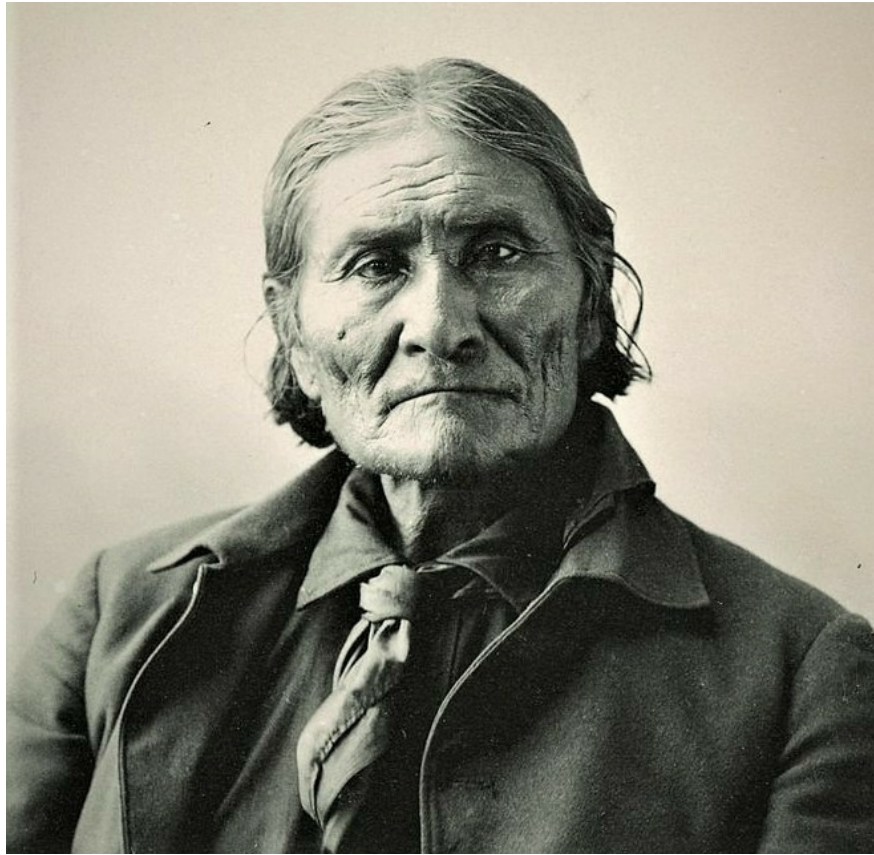


Ta-ayz-slath, wife of Geronimo, and child – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“He burned his family’s belongings in the Apache tradition and went into the wilderness to grieve their deaths. In the desert a voice told Geronimo, ‘No gun will ever kill you. I will guide your arrows.’ Filled with hatred of the Mexicans, Geronimo went on the warpath killing as many Mexicans as he could. When an American general tricked the head Apache chief, Mangas Coloradas, into a conference under a flag of truce, then murdered and mutilated him, Coloradas’ son-in-law, Cochise, convinced that the Americans held nothing sacred, led the Apaches into the Dragoon Mountains where they resisted capture for ten years. Undeclared in his mountain stronghold, Cochise foresaw that he couldn’t defeat the overwhelming forces of the U.S. With no choice other than extermination, with great doubt, Cochise decided to accept the governmental reservation at San Carlos. When the Feds dishonored the agreement by removing the Apaches further north and giving their lands to the settlers, Geronimo went on the war path once more.



Geronimo, Goyaaaté, a Mescalero-Chiricahua Apache leader and medicine man – Photograph by Ben Wittck, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia



Portrait of Geronimo, Mescalero-Chiricahua Apache leader, 1898
– Photograph by Frank A. Rinehart, public domain, Wikimedia



Dragoon Mountains, Southeastern Arizona, where Cochise's warriors resisted capture for ten years – Photograph by geologist Mark A. Wilson, Public domain, Wikimedia



Geronimo and his warriors before surrendering to General Crook in the Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico, 27 March 1886 – Photograph by Camillus Sidney Fly, Public domain, Wikimedia



Apache prisoners at rest stop by Southern Pacific Railway, near Nueces River, Texas, 10 September 1886. Geronimo is third from right, front row – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Chased for years by thousands of Mexican and American soldiers all over Mexico, Arizona, and New Mexico, Geronimo’s band was decimated and worn out. Forced to surrender, he was sent to a prison in Florida, then to Alabama, and finally to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

“The white man was clever,” Les said. “He turned Indian against Indian, using Indian scouts to track down and kill rival tribes. The army promised safe conduct during peace parleys, then in heinous acts of treachery, killed the Indian leaders who trusted them. Upon his deathbed in Oklahoma, Geronimo said, “I should have never surrendered. I should have fought until I was the last man alive.”

“Every story I’ve read about the Indians ended in a tragedy,” I said. “I haven’t read about the Cheyenne and Apache, but I’ve read a lot about the Lakota Sioux. My hero was Sitting Bull. Of all the Plains Indians, he was the leader I admired the most.”



Sitting Bull, albumen print, late 19th century cabinet card, Bismarck, Dakota Territory, 1883 – Photograph by David F. Barry, public domain, Wikimedia

“There was no reason for the Feds to kill Sitting Bull,” Les said. “They killed him because the white man feared the Ghost Dance religion which was sweeping across the prairies.”

“I’ve heard of the Ghost Dance, but never understood what it was or where it came from. It didn’t just appear out of thin air.”

“Actually, the Ghost Dance did appear out of thin air for one day the idea sprang from a man’s head. During an eclipse of the sun, Wovoka, a holy man of the Piute tribe, had a vision of the Supreme Being. After his messianic vision, Wovoka began preaching for rejuvenation of Indian ideals, hard work and peaceful coexistence between tribes. He believed that if Indians practiced the Ghost Dance and traditional ceremonial songs, the white man would disappear, the wild animals and buffalo herds would return in abundance, the ghosts of their ancestors would come to life and the world would return to the way it was before the white man destroyed the Native American’s way of life.”



Wovoka, a Northern Paiute shaman and creator of the Ghost Dance – U.S. Archives, public domain, Wikimedia

“The Ghost Dance was their way of recapturing the past.”

“In a matter of months, Wovoka created a pan-Indian religious movement. It spread like wildfire. Within one year it had supporters in nearly all the tribes.”

“But the spaces out West are vast. The tribes were numerous with no telegraph or roads, how could a new religion spread so quickly over that great a distance?”



The Ghost dance by the Oglala Lakota Sioux, Pine Ridge Agency, 1890 – Illustration by Frederic Remington, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“Necessity is the mother of creation,” Les said with a smile, his teeth bright against his skin the color of café au lait. “When mankind needs something, man finds a way to fulfill that need. Towards the end of the century, the Lakota Sioux were hurting badly. They were on the verge of starvation. Wovoka created the Ghost Dance religion at a time of great suffering. The Ghost Dance was created for the same reason that Negroes created spirituals, jazz, and rhythm and blues. It was the need to express the anguish and joy of a hard life.

“Why were the Lakotas starving?”

“Cause of a failed policy of the U.S. government, a decision made in Washington by people who didn’t know a damn thing about Indian ways. White settlers were moving illegally onto the Lakota lands of South Dakota. Miners were stealing across the border to work the gold mines in the Black Hills of the Lakotas. The U.S. government wanted to encourage white people to stake homestead claims and settle the land. To solve the ‘Indian Problem,’ in 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act to give the administration of Grover Cleveland the power to end the Indian’s communal holding of property. Senator Teller of Colorado was one of the few politicians who opposed the policy for it robbed Indians of the land they’d lived on for centuries. Without any negotiation, the government took away the Lakota land and broke up the Great Sioux Reservation.



A Shoshone encampment in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming, 1870 – Photograph by Percy Jackson, Smithsonian Institution, public domain, Wikimedia

“Each family was given a plot they had to farm. The Indians had no choice. Their children were forced to go to boarding schools where they were given religious indoctrination in the English language. It was forced assimilation. The whites were eradicating the Native American’s culture and language.

“Under the humanitarian guise of giving Indians individual properties, the real goal was to open up the lands for white settlers. After individual lots were given to Indians, the remaining land was declared surplus and sold to white settlers, railroads, and large corporations. Before the Dawes Act, Indians possessed 165 million acres. In just a few years, the Indians possessed only 75 million acres.

“Just before the turn of the century, the Curtis Act eliminated tribal control of their lands. All tribal courts and tribal governments were abolished with authority passing to the federal Dawes Commission. It was a death blow to tribal life. If you agreed to live on the 160 acres you were made a citizen of the U.S. but the terrible thing for the tribes was that they were no longer allowed to have self-government. They lost what little freedom they had left. They could no longer negotiate as a group. While it had the appearance of being an

honest effort to assimilate the Indian into white culture, it was a nefarious way of ripping off the Indian for his land. Criminal white officials transferred millions of acres from the Indians to the white settlers. 90 million acres were stripped from Native American ownership.

“The Bureau of Indian Affairs, a white organization run for the benefit of white people failed to realize that the Lakota were migratory hunters. Farming in Iowa might have worked for the Sioux, but not in arid South Dakota where there was little reliable rainfall. The truth was that the location and amount of land allotted to Indians was not economically viable for farming. The plains Indians were nomadic hunters. Their culture knew little about farming. Once settled on the reservation, the Lakota farms were hit by drought and intense heat. Drought periodically hits the Mid-West like it did during the 1920’s dust bowl. Some members of Congress called the Indians lazy. Bending to pressure, or maybe due to just plain ole spite and ignorance, the Indian agents *cut* the rations of the Lakota. With failed crops and the bison wiped out, the Lakota were facing starvation. The Indian was starved into submission.”

“So, Wovoka’s Ghost Dance religion was an attempt to overcome the loss of the bison.”



Sioux Ghost Dance, 1891 – Drawing by James P. Boyd, Philadelphia Publishers Union, public domain, Wikimedia

“When people are starving to death, they look for a prophet, someone to lead them out of the wilderness. Wovoka’s Ghost Dance inspired them to return to the sacred ways of their ancestors. In 1890, Ghost Dance ceremonies spread like wildfire throughout the Western Indian tribes. A historian at Oklahoma State University said that nearly all the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Wichita, Caddo, and Apache tribes, several thousand, danced every night for two weeks on the banks of the South Canadian River. To the whites the Ghost Dance was a scary thing.

“How could a dance frighten the federal government?”

“When you don’t understand something, it’s easy to get frightened. The Paiute tribe called Wovoka’s new religion ‘Dance in a Circle.’ The Lakotas called it the Spirit Dance or Ghost Dance. The tribe danced in a large circle, shoulder to shoulder singing ceremonial songs. Some would tell prophesies, others slipped into a trance. To the Lakota, it was a renewal of the earth, a washing away of evil. But when the white settlers and Indian agents saw the Lakotas dancing feverishly for five days, they were panicked. They were certain the Ghost Dancers were going to leave the reservation and go on the war path. That’s when the Bureau of Indian Affairs asked Sitting Bull to put a stop to the Ghost Dancers. Sitting Bull said he couldn’t do it. Indians did what they wanted to do, not what the government told them to do. It was a religious ceremony. The Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution guaranteed freedom of worship.”

“When I was a kid, I spent hours in the Viterbo library reading about the Sioux. Sitting Bull was a hero of mine. He had integrity which the U.S. Indian agents didn’t have. The chief of the Lakota’s was despised because of the defeat of Custer’s Cavalry at Little Big Horn River. When he refused to live on the federal reservation, his military genius enabled him to elude the U.S. Cavalry for years. His evasion of the army made him a legend to the Cheyenne and Sioux, a hero to all the Native American resisters. Sitting Bull’s strong medicine attracted other tribes to his camp which grew until there were 10,000. In 1890, Lt. Col. Custer’s 7th Cavalry discovered the Sitting Bull camp on the Little Big Horn River.”

“I’ve always wondered, why an officer experienced in the Civil War would attack when he was so vastly outnumbered. Why didn’t Custer bother to find out that there were 2,000 seasoned warriors in the camp? That was a big failure of intelligence. Perhaps, it was Custer’s compulsion to chase glory. But with the same over confidence of the French knights at Agincourt, he ordered the attack on the Lakotas. Big surprise, for Custer’s men were quickly overcome until every last soldier was killed including Colonel Custer.”



Battle of Little Bighorn from the Indian point of view, 1903 – Lithograph by Charles Marion Russell, Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“The defeat of the U.S. Calvary,” I said, “scared the shit out of the whites. The U.S. retaliated by sending in great numbers of troops to pursue the Lakota relentlessly, forcing most tribes to surrender, but not Sitting Bull. He escaped to Saskatchewan, Canada. Eventually though, it was the same bitter story. Without the buffalo to sustain the hunters, Sitting Bull’s band didn’t have a way to earn a living. The conditions of his surrender meant that Sitting Bull would live as a prisoner of war.

“When he was growing old, Sitting Bull was asked by Bill Cody to tour with him in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show and he was allowed to leave the reservation to do the tour. Sitting Bull was a big hit with the crowds — an ambassador of the Sioux to the whites. Annie Oakley and the Lakota chief became close friends. Sitting Bull thought Annie had supernatural powers that allowed her to shoot with more precision than a man. He adopted her as a daughter. Called her ‘Little Sure Shot.’ The best shot in the west,” I laughed, “was a woman.”

“I hadn’t remembered that,” Les said smiling and shaking his head. “Sitting Bull was an amazing man. He was tough but he knew when to bend, like a reed surviving in a storm. He was facing the monster of the great American imperative — *get some land*.



U.S. cavalry attacking an Indian village – Unknown author, *Indian History for Young Folks*, Samuel Francis Drake, Public domain, Wikimedia



The Silenced War Whoop – Painting by Charles Schreyvogel, American Museum of Western Art, Public domain, Wikimedia



Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill, 1885 – Photograph by William Notman and Sons, Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia



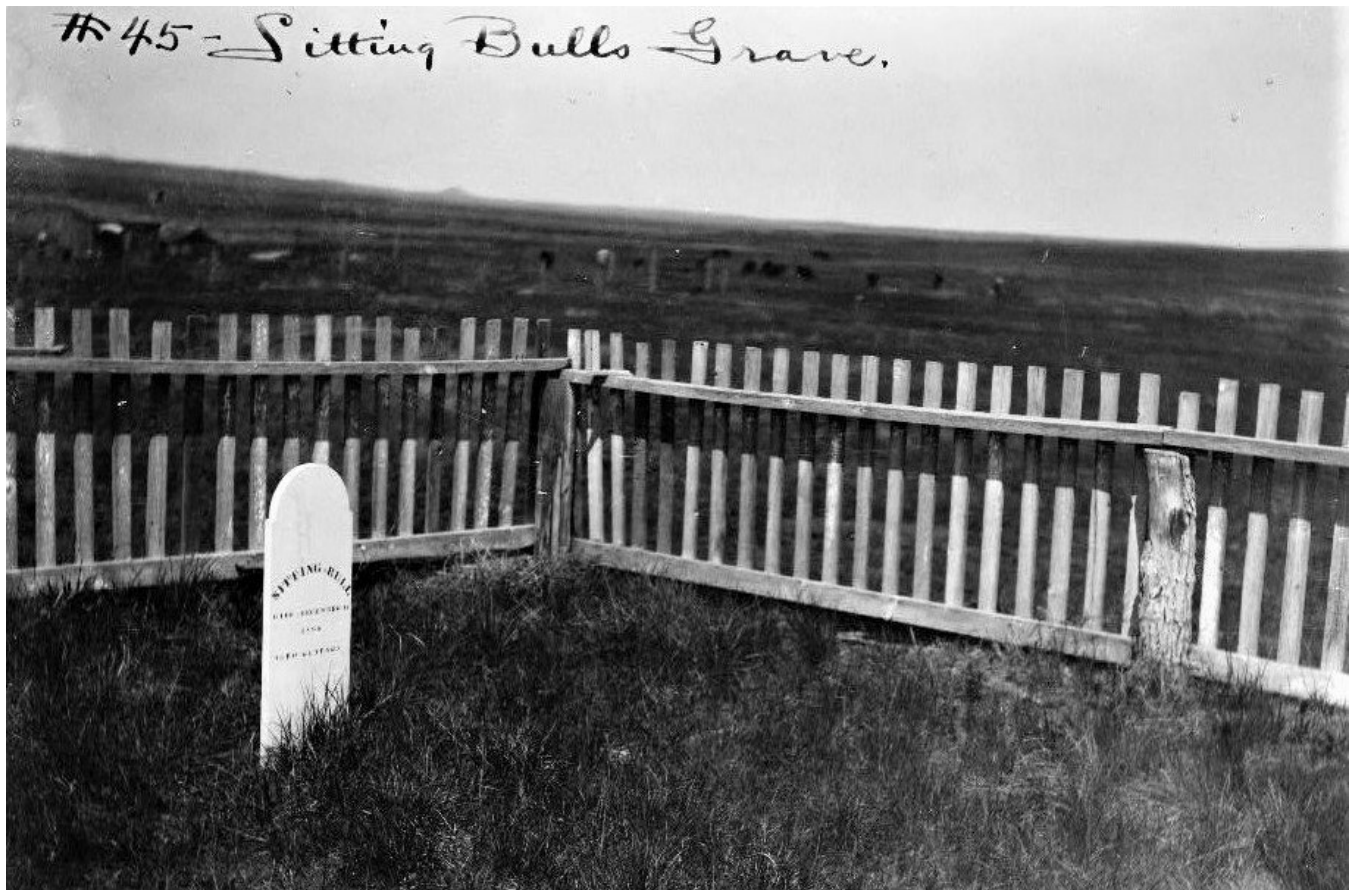
Poster for *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show* and portrait of Col. W.F. Cody on horseback, 1899 – Author, Courier Litho. Co., Buffalo, N.Y., U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“Sitting Bull,” I said, “went from being a celebrity in Buffalo Bill’s show to being a pariah when he came home to Standing Rock Agency to face the same paranoia of years before. The U.S. Indian agents believed he was the spiritual leader of the Ghost Dancers and ordered the police to arrest him before he escaped with the Ghost Dancers and started a war. When Sitting Bull refused the order to mount his horse, the police tried to force him to mount. In the scuffle, a shot rang out from the camp. The police shot Sitting Bull in the head.

“Two weeks later, the U.S. 7th Cavalry Regiment intercepted Spotted Elk’s Lakota band and forced them to camp at Wounded Knee Creek. When the rest of Colonel Forsyth’s regiment arrived, the soldiers surrounded the Lakotas and set up four 42 mm Hotchkiss cannons on the hill training them on Spotted Elk’s camp.”

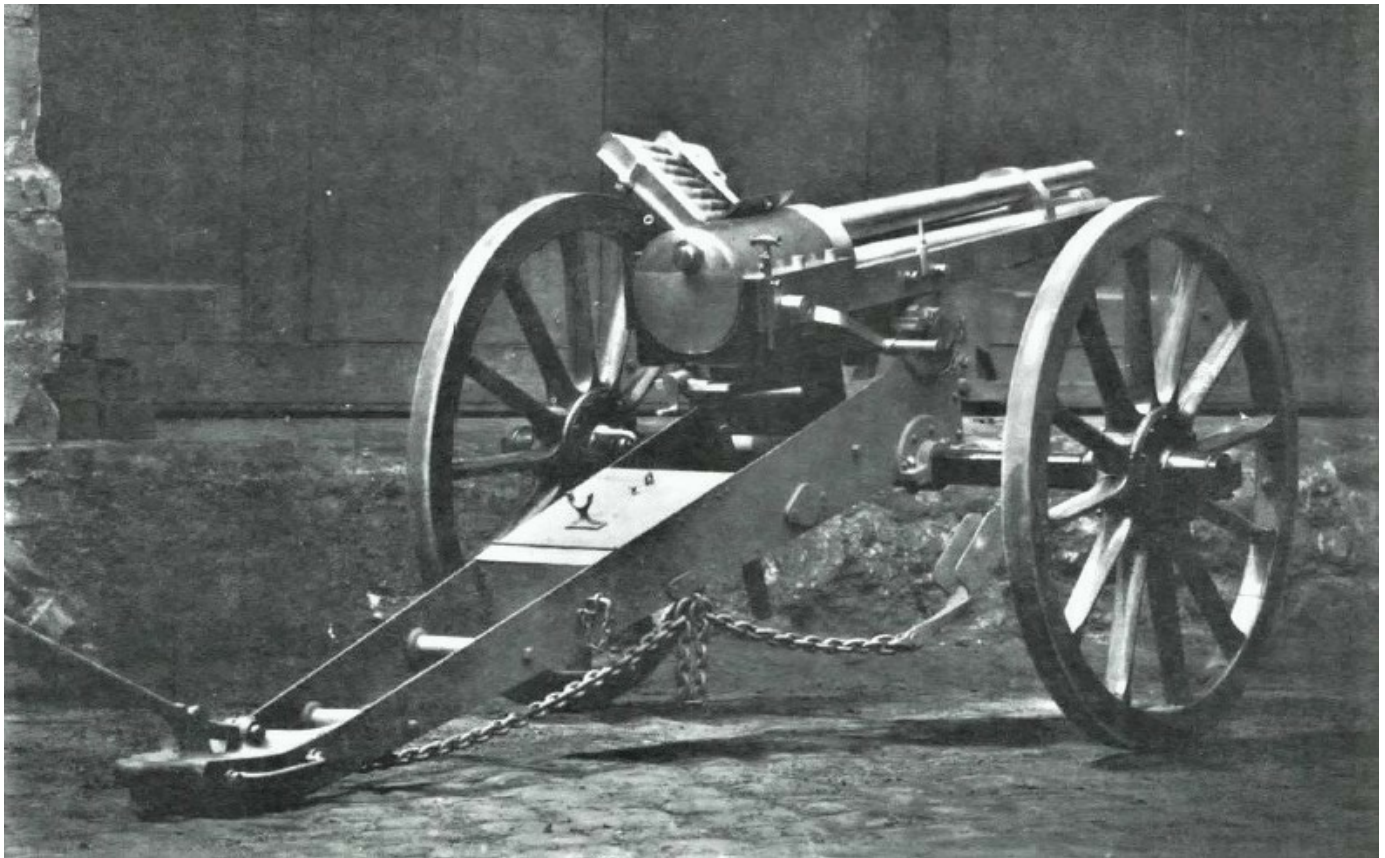
“I’ve not heard of a Hotchkiss cannon.”

“It was a state-of-the-art weapon of the time, manufactured in France by Hotchkiss et Cie.



Sitting Bull's grave at Fort Yates, North Dakota, tribal headquarters of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 1906 – Photograph by Frank Bennett Fiske, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“The U.S. imported a number of these fast firing mobile canons which were designed for cavalry over rough terrain. Two weeks after the killing of Sitting Bull, the soldiers entered the Lakota camp to take away their weapons. A deaf Lakota, Black Coyote, refused to give up his gun. A shot rang out, and the soldiers opened fire with the four Hotchkiss cannons raking fire on the men, women, and kids in the camp. Chief Spotted Elk, and the women and children fled onto the prairie. They were hunted down and killed one by one, including women with babies, their bodies left lying frozen in the snow for days until buried in a mass grave. Days later, four infants were found alive wrapped in their dead mother’s shawl, one still suckling at his dead mother’s breast. One survivor recalls that the soldiers called for boys to come out of hiding promising they’d be safe. When the kids came out, the soldiers slaughtered them. One soldier remembered that the warriors, squaws, children, ponies, and dogs were killed in the withering fire of the Hotchkiss guns. It’s hard to believe, but artillery made in France killed the Sioux at Wounded Knee. The soldiers went so berserk that that they even gunned down a number of their own men. Chief Spotted Elk’s people were all killed. It was right after Christmas, 1890. With Sitting Bull dead, it was the end of the Lakota resistance.”



Hotchkiss revolving canon, 1874 – Unknown author, Public domain, Wikimedia. The U.S. military first used the Hotchkiss mountain gun against the [Nez Percé](#) in 1877, which was of lighter weight than the revolving canon pictured here. Four Hotchkiss guns were used at Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.



Slain Lakota Sioux lie frozen in the snow at Wounded Knee, 1890 – U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia



U.S. soldiers with the rapid-fire Hotchkiss mountain guns used at the Wounded Knee Massacre – John Grabill, Library of Congress, Wikimedia



Slain Lakota Sioux lie frozen in the snow at Wounded Knee, December 29, 1890 – U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia. 150 - 200 Lakota Sioux old men, women, and children were slain, 30 U.S. troops killed, most by friendly fire. 20 soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor for the slaughter.



Burial party, loading victims of the massacre on a cart for burial in a mass grave, 1890 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



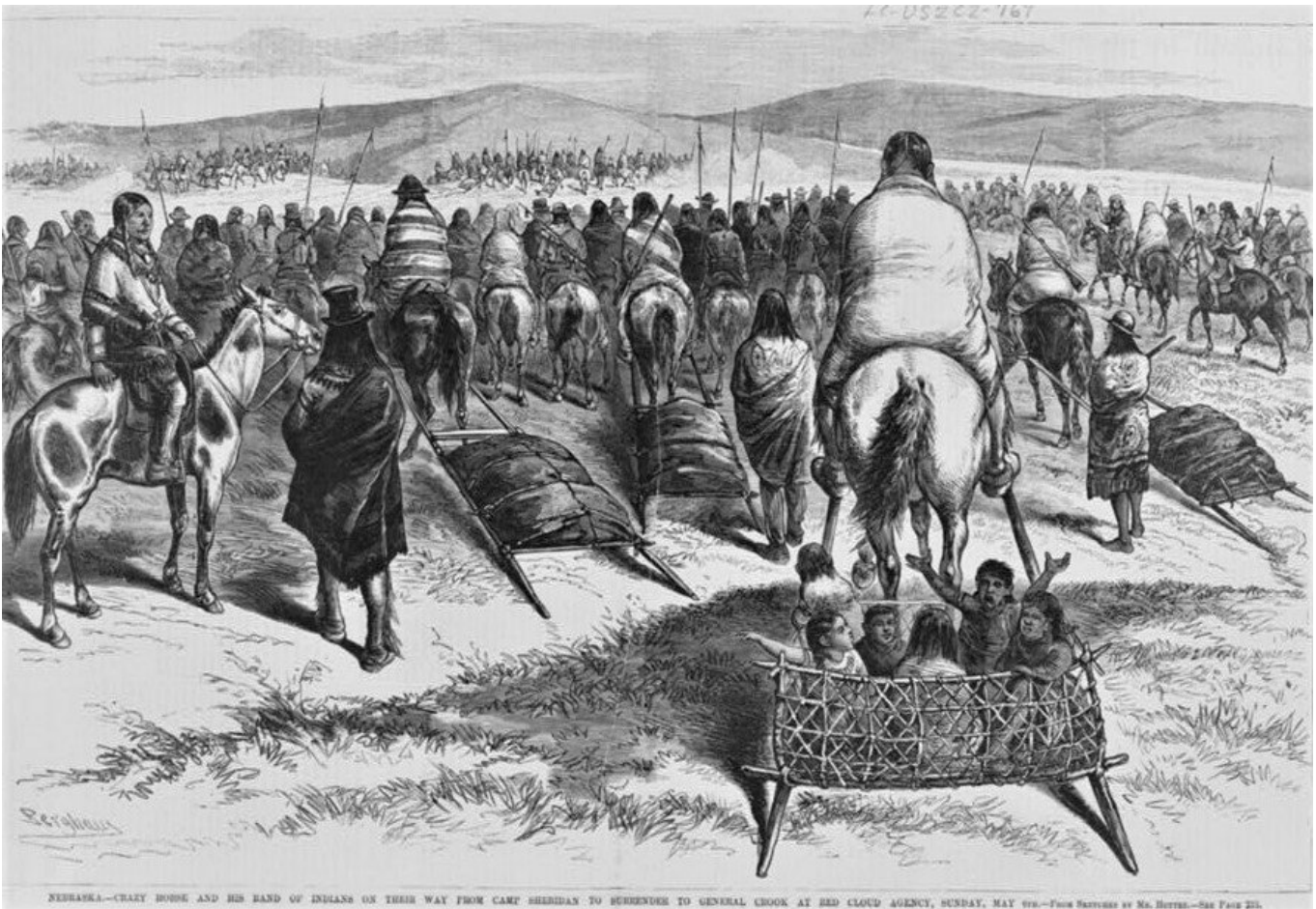
Miniconjou, Lakota Sioux Chief Spotted Elk with numerous gunshot wounds lies frozen in the snow after the massacre of Wounded Knee, 1890 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. Sitting Bull was Spotted Elk's half-brother. Crazy Horse, the renowned warrior at the Battle of Little Bighorn, was Spotted Elk's nephew.



U.S. soldiers burying Lakota corpses in a mass grave after the massacre at Wounded Knee. Many of the 300 Lakota corpses were frozen. – Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-44458, Wikimedia

“Yvonne told me that at the beginning of the British colonization of the Eastern seaboard of America in the 17th century, the native Indian population was estimated to be at least five million. Many died under the Spanish occupation and by the time of the ratification of the Constitution Bill of Rights in 1791, the Indian population had been reduced to less than a million. Yvonne said, ‘The Bill of Rights didn’t apply to the original population of North America.’ One hundred years later in 1890 when the Lakota Sioux were massacred at Wounded Knee Creek, only 250,000 Indians were left surviving. If this is not genocide, I don’t know what is.”

“The settlers celebrated,” Les said, “after the killing of the Lakota band. They didn’t see the Ghost Dancers as a rejuvenation of traditional Indian values. Ghost Dancers were a murderous cult that had to be suppressed to save white culture. A newspaper editor wrote an editorial saying, ‘Our safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians.’ To protect civilization, he advocated that ‘these untamable creatures be wiped from the face of the earth.’”



Crazy Horse and his band of Oglala on their way from Camp Sheridan to surrender to General Crook at Red Cloud Agency, 6 May 1877 – Drawing by Mr. Hottes, public domain, Wikimedia

“That’s the bitter truth, Gio,” Les said, taking off his octagonal eyeglasses and laying them on the table, revealing the lines beneath his eyes. “The Massacre of Wounded Knee marked the end of the American Indian’s independence. The Messianic dream of the Ghost Dance died at Wounded Knee.”

Les cleaned his eyeglasses a second time, a habit he had when he was thinking about a problem. “Sitting Bull couldn’t survive without the buffalo. That was the heart of the matter. Take away the Indian’s way of earning a living. That’ll take away their power. That was the first thing Hitler did to the Jews, take away their jobs. And that’s what the U.S. did to the Indians. When Lewis and Clark crossed the plateau west of the Mississippi, which Jefferson had bought from Napoleon, they witnessed millions and millions of buffalo grazing on the vast grasslands. It’s estimated that there were 200 million buffalo in the early 19th century. A train once ran through a herd of buffalo stretching 120 miles. General Sheridan rode through a herd for three days.”

“It’s hard to imagine,” I said, “what millions and millions of buffalos would look like reaching to the horizon, then in other places, ride for days and not see one at all. The Indians had to follow the herd to survive.”



Bison herd grazing at the National Bison Range in Montana – Photograph by U.S. Department of the Interior, public domain, Wikimedia



Male and female bison in Yellowstone National Park – Photograph by Arturo de Frias Marques, Wikimedia



Bison hunt with the wolf-skin disguise, 1832–33 – Unknown author, Smithsonian American Art Museum, public domain, Wikimedia. Before the Native Americans had horses, in the 18th century, they disguised themselves as wolves to stealthily approach their prey. Bison tolerated packs of wolves because half of the calves that were born each year died, their remains eaten by the wolves.



Bison fighting in Grand Teton National Park in Moose, Wyoming – Photograph by Yunner, Wikimedia



Indians hunting the bison – Illustration by Karl Bodmer, Nordamerika Native Museum, Zurich, Switzerland, public domain, Wikimedia



Assiniboine hunting buffalo – Painting by Paul Kane, National Gallery of Canada, public domain, Wikimedia



Attacking the Grizzly Bear, 1844 – Painting by George Catlin, New York Public Library, public domain, Wikimedia



Hunting Bison, 1844 - Painting by George Catlin, public domain, Library and Archives, Canada, Wikimedia.

“The white man,” Les said, “was determined to wipe out the bison to destroy the food source of the Indian Nations. By destroying their food, they could destroy the Indian’s resistance. It was a deliberate policy of all the white settlements, slaughtering as many as fifty million in one year, taking the hides and leaving the meat and bones rotting on the ground.



Rath & Wright's bison hide yard in Dodge City, Kansas, with 40,000 buffalo hides – Unknown author, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia



American bison skulls to be crushed for fertilizer, 1892 – Unknown author, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Wikimedia

“In one year alone, 5 million were killed. By the early 1880’s, the Northern and Southern herds were annihilated, the prairie left littered with bones and rotting flesh, leaving a stench you could smell for miles. The American businessman, seeing a way to make a quick buck on the killings, sold excursion tickets to the slaughter. Passengers could shoot out the windows of the train into massed herds, killing hundreds, leaving the buffalos on the prairie to bleed to death.

Striking the table with his fist, Les said in great anger, “The whites had no understanding of the despair of the Indians when they saw the core of their whole life destroyed. Catastrophic. The Indian made every thing from the buffalo — tools, teepees, bedding, and cooking vessels. By killing off the bison, the white man destroyed the one thing essential to the Indian’s existence. Seeing the vast herds vanish from the plains, the despair was just driven deeper and deeper for the buffalo was a great spiritual force in their religion. The Indians, desperate to bring the sacred buffalo back, chanted and danced in vain.”

“When a bill was introduced in Congress to protect the disappearing herds, military officers convinced the legislators to allow the slaughter of the vast herds as the best way to starve the Plains Indians off the land. Just a few short years after the hunters started killing them in mass, buffaloes were gone and the horse loving, freedom loving nomads were forced to live on reservations far from their native lands.”

“It is hard to imagine,” I said, “what it’s like to have your way of making a living and your land taken away from — to have your way of life destroyed, a way of life that has endured for centuries. The quest for land is a dreadful thing.”

“From the time the colonialists settled America,” Les said, “it was the same story, the white settlers pushing the Shawnees out of Virginia and Pennsylvania into the Ohio valley. After the British ceded the Ohio Valley to the United States, a band of Shawnees established Prophetstown near the union of the Wabash and Tippecanoe rivers in Indiana. A new leader arose among the Shawnees, Tecumseh. Embittered when his father was killed by settlers when he was a boy, Tecumseh, envisioned the creation of a sovereign Native American nation east of the Mississippi. ‘Let us form one body, one heart, and defend to the last warrior our country, our homes, our liberty, and the graves of our fathers.’ An eloquent orator, Tecumseh traveled from Ohio to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama to persuade tribes to join the Indian confederation. ‘Sleep no longer, O Choctaws and Chickasaws,’ he said. ‘Will not the bones of our dead be plowed up, and their graves turned into plowed fields.’ His brother, the Prophet Tenskwatawa, preached a religious revival, predicting an apocalypse

which would annihilate the American settlers. Tenskwatawa urged a return to the traditional culture, reject the ways of the white man, abandon European clothing and alcohol, and swear to never cede land to the white people.”



Shawnee chief Tecumseh – Author, possibly Owen Staples created from Lossing’s engraving based on a pencil sketch by French trader Pierre Le Dru, taken from life around 1808, Toronto Public Library, Public domain, Wikimedia



Tecumseh's younger brother, Tenskwatawa known as The Shawnee Prophet, predicted an apocalypse that would destroy the European American settlers – Painting by George Catlin, Smithsonian American Art Museum, public domain, Wikimedia

“Pushing brandy and rum on Native Americans,” I said, “was a vicious way of destroying Indian culture. Traders negotiated better trade deals for furs, commodities, and land by getting the Indians drunk.”

“Tenskwatawa,” Les said, “had a problem with alcohol when he was young. He realized that it would destroy the Indians. French fur traders were the first to hook Native Americans on brandy and rum. Because all indigenous tribes engaged in the fur trade, no tribe escaped the ravages of alcohol. After the governor of Indiana Territory had conned the tribes into selling three million acres for a paltry amount, Tecumseh was outraged. Indian land was sacrosanct. It was owned in common by all. ‘No tribe has the right to sell,’ Tecumseh said, ‘even to each other, much less to strangers.’”

“In 1811, The Great Comet appeared, the gleaming coma of its nucleus one million miles across even larger than the sun, visible to the naked eye for several months. Before radio and movies came along, the sky

was the greatest show on earth. A few months after the comet soared across the sky, an earthquake erupted near the Mississippi River town of New Madrid — the most powerful earthquake in American recorded history, even greater than the earthquake which demolished San Francisco. A few months later, another massive earthquake hit on a reverse fault so devastating that it created a temporary waterfall on the Mississippi. The tribes of Tecumseh's Confederation saw the earthquakes as omens for the apocalypse as foreseen by the Prophet Tenskwatawa. Angry with the invasion of the American settlers, the Great Spirit was going to destroy the world.

“When the British-American War of 1812 broke out, Tecumseh declared war on the United States, to establish a sovereign Native American nation. After the British and Tecumseh's forces captured Fort Detroit, Commodore Perry's victory on Lake Erie severed the British supply lines and General William Henry Harrison pursued the British and Tecumseh into Ontario, Canada where the Americans army overwhelmed them, killing Tecumseh, forcing the surrender of the Indian Confederation which was the end of Tecumseh's vision for a sovereign Native American nation. Today, the brilliant Native American statesman is etched in the sculpted frieze on the rotunda of the United States Capitol.

With a sigh, Les put his eyeglasses on, his dark eyes hard and cold, “Step by step, the white man did what he wanted when he wanted. The Shawnees were forced into Missouri and Kansas near the Neosho River and were later compelled to move to Oklahoma after the Civil War. The Indian's new home in Oklahoma was another false promise of the U.S. government, a betrayal that's played out time and time again from the moment the white man arrived on the Continent. The Indian's few years of freedom vanished even before the U.S. Calvary blew the bugle on The Great Land Rush of 1889, opening Oklahoma Territory up for anyone to stake a land claim. At that time, there were two Oklahomas — Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory.”

“You said you had Indian blood. Did your family come from Oklahoma?”

“Both sides of my family had folks in Oklahoma with mixed blood, Mama's in Langston, my aunties in Tulsa, and Papa's near the Cherokee nation's tribal lands in Tahlequah. In 1890, the same year Sitting Bull was killed, Edward McCabe, a black leader in Kansas founded the all black town of Langston in Oklahoma Territory. McCabe's dream of a majority-black state inspired a migration of black settlers from the South. After the Civil war, blacks couldn't survive as a sharecropper. They had been freed, but their poverty was just as fierce as before. McCabe sent traveling salesmen throughout the South recruiting settlers for Oklahoma. He placed ads in black newspapers in little towns advertising the attractions of freedom for blacks in

Oklahoma Territory. Thousands rushed for land in the Oklahoma wilderness, whites and blacks riding in trains and wagons, on horseback and mule back, walking from Mississippi, Alabama, the Carolinas and Louisiana to make a new life on the prairie. Poor people in the South just up and moved for a new start in life. Along with their mules, the settlers brought with them white supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan. Tulsa was Mississippi on the Arkansas River — the Mississippi which had levied the poll tax and robbed the black man of the vote. One Klansman, a Mississippi senator bragged about the effectiveness of lynching in holding down the Negro vote: ‘You and I know the best way to keep the nigger from voting. You do it the night right before the election.’

“Even before the land rush, there were hundreds of blacks in Oklahoma for they had come with the Indians in the middle of the 19th century. In the Southeastern United States, the Civilized Tribes had adopted the white man’s system of slavery to work their farms. When the Tribes were forced by President Jackson and Congress to move to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears, they brought their slaves with them. At the beginning of the Civil War, there were over 50,000 Indians in Oklahoma with over 8,000 black slaves. That’s how I got the blood of the Cherokees. My granddad from Mississippi came to Oklahoma and married with a Cherokee who’d originally come from Georgia. Around the time of the Civil War, the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, and the Chickasaws had thousands of slaves while the Seminoles had only five hundred. Many of the wealthy mixed-blood Indian slave holders treated their slaves as harshly as the whites had. But the poor Indian slave owners worked in the fields alongside their slaves. The Native Americans avoided breaking up families, allowed freedom of religion and the right to learn to read and write, rights which the white slave holders had forbidden slaves on Southern plantations. The blacks became assimilated to Indian ways, preparing food the same way, sharing herbal remedies, and wearing the same style of clothing. It was only a matter of time until the blacks became Indians.

“The Seminoles had a different approach than the other slave holding tribes. They took in fugitive slaves, protected them from slave-catchers and allowed blacks to live in separate villages with their own horses and weapons in a kind of medieval military alliance with the Seminoles in exchange for a percentage of their crop. The other Civilized Tribes passed strict slave codes banning intermarriage between blacks and Indians. Under tribal law, a white man could achieve tribal citizenship by marrying an Indian woman, but a black man was forbidden to marry an Indian woman. Miscegenation was to be punished by a severe lashing and banishment from the nation.”



Stump Horn of the Cheyenne Nation and his family with a travois hitched to his horse – Unknown author, public domain, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia



Members of the Muscogee Creek Nation in Oklahoma around 1877, some with part European and African ancestry – Unknown author, public domain, Smithsonian Institution, Wikimedia

“But you said, your granddad married a Cherokee woman.”

“Laws are one thing, and human nature is another,” Les said, expelling a long column of fragrant smoke. “There was racial mingling long before emancipation. Things came to a head when the Cherokee slaves working at the steamship port of Webber Falls on the Arkansas River saw slaves dressed in the Seminole fashion, riding their own horses and carrying knives and rifles. The freedom that the Seminoles had given their slaves started the Cherokee slaves to thinking.”

“The Seminole slaves played a similar role as the Haitian French slaves during the revolt in Charleston.”

“That an accurate comparison. By socializing with the Seminole slaves, the Cherokees slaves began to think about escaping to Mexico.”

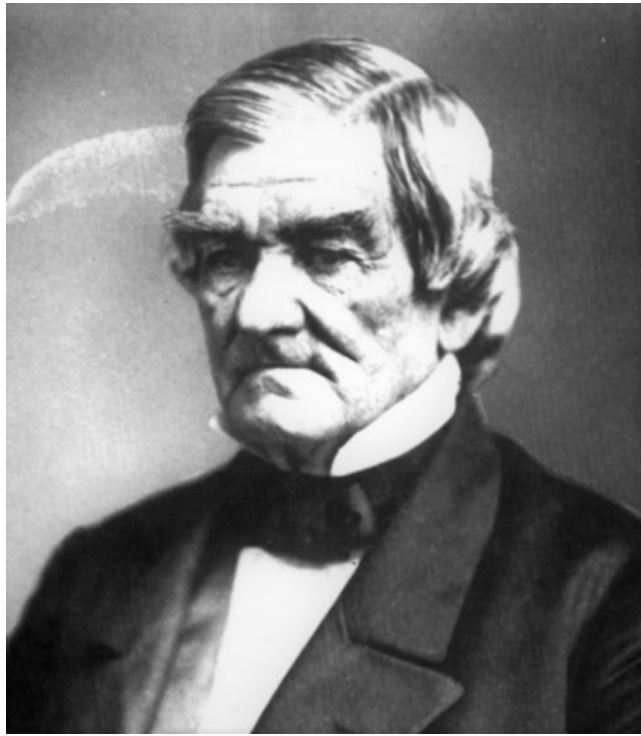
“There was a revolt brewing.”

“You guessed right. Cherokee plantation owner, Joe Vann who ran steamships on the river, had over 200 slaves working his land raising cattle and cultivating corn, wheat, tobacco, and cotton. One night, twenty or more of Vann’s slaves at Webbers Falls, locked their overseers in their cabins while they were sleeping, stole guns, mules, horses, ammunition, and food and took off for Mexico where slavery had been abolished some years before. The Cherokees sent out a posse with bloodhounds trailing them through the Creek Nation where more slaves joined the fugitives. When they caught up with them, the slaves fought off the Cherokees in a fire fight and the failed posse returned to Tahlequah where Chief John Ross authorized a Cherokee Militia of one hundred men to capture the fugitive slaves. When they caught up with them moving slowly because of the children, weak from lack of food, they surrendered. Blaming the Seminole blacks for the revolt, the Cherokee Nation formed a detachment to capture escaping slaves and passed a law evicting all black Seminole freedmen living in the Cherokee Nation.”

“Were there any Native Americans who opposed slavery?”

“There were Indians and white missionaries abolitionists, like the Keetoowahs in the Cherokee nation who called for the end of slavery and a return to the ancient customs. Three hundred free black Seminoles under Chief John Horse and Chief Wild Cat fled to freedom in Mexico and an underground railroad sprang up to aid slaves to escape to Kansas.

“Among the Cherokees, there was a split between Union and Confederacy. The pro-Union Cherokees



John Ross, Chief of the Cherokee for 38 years – 19th century photograph, Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

freed their slaves in 1863, but the pro-Confederacy Cherokees kept their slaves until after the Civil War when the old treaties were declared dead and new treaties were made in 1866 which abolished slavery making the blacks and Indians citizens of the United States.

“After abolition, the freed slaves formed towns in Indian Territory near their former Indian masters. Indians from all parts of the states were pushed into Oklahoma. When Texas was threatening genocide against the Indians, tribes migrated northward to the Leased District in western Indian Territory. Oklahoma and Texas have a great rivalry,” Les said with a laugh, “but when it comes to black people, the whites of both states have an identical point of view — they drink the same moonshine.

“Gradually, state by state, Indians were forced into Indian Territory, not only the five civilized tribes, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole from the Southeast, but the Ottawa, Seneca, and Delaware from the Northeast, the Kickapoo, Fox, and Sacs from the Great Lakes, the Pawnee, Ponca, Iowa, Kansas, Miami, Peoria, Wichita, Caddo, and Cheyenne from the Great Plains, the Comanche and Apache from the Southwest deserts — all pushed into Oklahoma. Thirty-nine tribes from twelve linguistic families live in Oklahoma today. Incredible as it might seem, there are more languages spoken in the State of Oklahoma, than in all of Europe.”

“Oklahoma is an Indian name?”

“It’s from the Choctaw Muskogean language, *Oklah homma* — red people.” A lot of mixing of the races occurred in Oklahoma. Ever since the colonialists brought slaves from Africa, there were mixed marriages of blacks and Indians. In the Revolutionary War, Joseph Louis Cook, born in Quebec to a black father and a Mohawk mother, fought with George Washington’s Continental Army. The Continental Congress commissioned Cook as a Lieutenant Colonel in Washington’s army. It was the only commission given in the Revolutionary War to a man of African ancestry. In Oklahoma, dozens of black towns were founded by former slaves and the African Cherokees. Living in their own towns, blacks in Oklahoma were free to throw off the yoke of discrimination, free to build farms and businesses. In those little towns, they were free at last.

“Considering what they’d faced in Georgia, Oklahoma must have been ‘The Promised Land.’”

“For a time,” Les said polishing his eyeglasses once again, “it was the Promised Land. “Eastern Oklahoma is blessed with some fertile farmland once you get out of the hill country. Indians and blacks prospered and some like my ancestors, intermarried. But it didn’t remain the Promised Land for the Indian very long. I’ve read an Oklahoma historian, Angie Debo’s book, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes*, published just before the war. She tells how the settlers and land speculators defrauded the Indians over a period of years, robbing the Indian settlements of what remained of their richest soil.



Angie Elbertha Debo, American historian of Native Americans, author of *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* – Unknown author, fair use, Wikimedia. Most of *Celine on Fire*’s information on Native Americans is based on Debo’s work.

“By leasing Indian land, white men’s towns grew up throughout Indian Territory. The white settlers arrived in such hordes that they quickly outnumbered the Indians. Because the settlers were not citizens of the tribes, the Indian governments found it nearly impossible to maintain authority over citizens of the United States. Unable to levy city taxes, there were few schools, little police or fire protection, no sewers, street lighting, or paving. Consequently, territorial law was barely existent. Only the most depraved Indian Territory bad men were pursued by temporarily sworn in deputies who had no proper training in law enforcement. With no way of legally enforcing payment of debts, a frequent way of settling accounts was for a debtor to shoot the creditor, or a creditor to shoot the debtor. Oklahoma was a territory without law. Cultivating land for which they couldn’t secure title under Federal law, white settlers bellowed for the abolition of tribal government.”

“So, the settlers demand for land,” I broke in, “led to the Dawes Act which ended the Indian’s communal holding of property.”

“The Dawes Act, that was the breaker for the Indian,” Les said with resignation, “a real crusher. Dawes, a Senator from Massachusetts and self-proclaimed Indian expert, came back from Indian Territory waxing lyrical over Indian prosperity. Paradoxically, he proposed changing a perfect society because it upheld the wrong principles of property ownership. Tribal ownership of Indian land was against the principles of capitalism.”

“Didn’t the Indians have any white leaders championing their cause?”

“There may have been, but I don’t know of any. Articles published in the Indian Territory press were unanimous in demanding the abolition of tribal ownership of land. Debo said that the Dawes reports morally condemned the ‘exploitation’ of Indians under the existing system. The reports advocated the deliverance from the Indian from tribal law. About as objective as a government’s manifesto before declaring war, the Dawes Commission claimed that the Indian governments were corrupt; Indians were failing to develop the rich resources of Indian Territory. Out of fifty-five newspapers in Indian Territory, fifty called for putting the Indians under white territorial government.”

“Why didn’t they fight back against such a raw deal?”

“The Cherokee Nation fought back,” Les thundered, striking his fist on the table so hard it nearly upset our drinks. “They compared the Dawes Act to the Trojan horse which the Greeks used to conquer Troy. Just as Spotted Tail, Red Cloud, and Lone Horn, the statesmen of the Sioux Nation, went to Washington D.C. in



Spotted Tail's delegation to Washington – Unknown author, public domain, Smithsonian Institution, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia. After gold was discovered in the Black Hills of the Sioux, delegations headed by Spotted Tail, Red Cloud, and Lone Horn traveled to Washington in 1875 to persuade President Ulysses Grant to honor existing treaties and stop the invasion of miners into their sacred territories. After meeting with Grant, Secretary of the Interior, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the U.S. government offered \$25,000 for the Black Hills reservation and a resettlement of the Sioux in Indian Territory. Spotted Tail rejected the offer saying, *I have considered all the Great Father told me, and have come here to give you an answer. . . When I was here before, the President gave me my country, and I put my stake down in a good place, and there I want to stay. . . I respect the Treaty but the white men who come in our country do not. You speak of another country, but it is not my country; it does not concern me, and I want nothing to do with it. I was not born there. . . If it is such a good country, you ought to send the white men now in our country there and let us alone.*

1875 to defend the rights of their tribe, the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw formed the Four Mothers Society and sent delegations to Washington petitioning the government to restore the old treaties. But like the Sioux, the Five Civilized Tribes lost their tribal governments and their land.

“Not much happened until Chitto Harjo, called Crazy Snake, created the Crazy Snake Uprising in 1909. Crazy Snake lived in a log cabin, sharpened neighbor’s farm instruments, made ornaments on a little forge and kept a patch of corn and a horse. A great orator of the Muscogee Creek Nation, he argued eloquently for observing the old treaties. Crazy Snake said that the treaties were ‘to be kept as long as long as the grass grows, as long as the sun rises, as long as the waters run. That is what the white man said, and we believed him.’ The Snakes posted notices that Indians must not take allotments of land or rent land to whites or employ whites in any way. When the Snake Uprising began to spread among the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Seminoles,

a troop of cavalry arrested a hundred Indians, and the judge sentenced them to prison terms with the condition that they would not be released unless they accepted the allotment of land.

Some members of the Five Civilized Tribes began thinking that a solution would be to sell their land allotments and buy a tract of land in Mexico or South America, emigrate like Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalism back to Africa movement. Garvey said that there was no hope for equality in America. The African American quest for social equality in America was a delusion. Whites will never allow it. Only by returning to their homeland in Africa could the Negro find freedom.



Founded by Jamaican Black Nationalist leader, Marcus Garvey, the UNIA holds a parade through Harlem, 1 January 1920 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“In desperation, the Indians were thinking the same thing. A Choctaw full blood said the white man doesn't want the Indian. We don't want the white man. White people had crossed the great ocean to escape discrimination. It is only fair, to let the Indian Nations do the same. The Divine Creator had given to the Indian, the right to exist as a race. There was no solution but to emigrate.

“How sad, the original people driven off their land.”

“The Five Civilized Tribes were peaceful, hardworking, and stayed on the reservation, but the same tragedy that had brought the Sioux to their knees, brought down the tribes of Oklahoma. The Indian was forced

to accept an individual plot of land. The government sold the balance to the settlers and railroads. The idea of personal property was entirely new to the Indian's experience. The Indian had no conception of owning a piece of fenced in land. Everything belonged to the tribe. The chief and elders decided how the land was to be used. There were no fences. You shared with the tribe.

“When our ancestors evolved from hunting to farming civilizations, they lost respect for the animal spirits and began to see themselves as the rulers of nature. For the Indian the world was wild and beautiful, filled with the spirits of animals, wind, and rain.”

Les paused, pulled out two of his precious Cubans and we lit up. We smoked in silence for a while before Les continued, “Losing their autonomy and losing control of their tax money, meant the Indians were going to lose control of their schools. They were very proud of their boarding schools. The schools were a key foundation of their culture. Education was how they perpetuated their language and beliefs. The loss of control over their boarding schools, was an insult to the proud Indian.”



Native American graduates of the Carlisle Boarding School, Pennsylvania, 1890s – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. Richard Henry Pratt founded the first federally supported Indian boarding school to assimilate Native Americans to American culture, forcing them to give up traditional tribal ways. From the time of its founding in 1879 until the end of World War I, 10,000 Native Americans from 140 tribes attended Carlisle. The students were forced to cut off their long hair and replace their moccasins with boots. The girls had to wear dresses and the boys school uniforms. Forbidden to speak their native languages, the Native Americans were subjected to a total immersion in white culture.

“Management of Indian affairs was under the Secretary of the Interior with the appointment of Indian managers made by political patronage. Every Senator and Congressman was besieging the Interior Department seeking jobs for their supporters. The white people that were appointed knew beans about Indians. You can imagine what happened. John Benedict of Illinois was appointed superintendent of schools for Indian Territory. While he was the government official in charge of Indian schools, he was simultaneously president of the private State Bank of Muskogee. Benedict condemned the Indian schools, even though they had produced eloquent leaders. Benedict reported to his superiors in the Interior Department that the children were guilty of conversing with each other in their native language while in English class. Benedict condemned the Indian emphasis on the study of academic training. They were preparing boys for college and the professions instead of industry. Benedict discovered that the Indian girls were studying mathematics and Latin, God forbid, instead of learning housekeeping and cooking.

“Loss of the schools was devastating to Indian’s self-esteem. Like the blacks, the Indians were a scorned race by the white settlers. The schools may have been only log cabins with benches, but they were a precious possession for the Indian. Historian Angie Debo quoted a Chickasaw leader, ‘Ever since we walked to Oklahoma, we’ve raised lots of schools for our people. We were proud of our schools. Our children went to them until the white man came in and crowded us out and took our schools away.’”

Les stopped and grinned. “Sorry to bend your ear. I could talk all night about what the white man has done to the Indian. Damn, I’m hungry, how about you?”

“I’m starved. Where do you want to go?”

“Have you been to the Cabaret Au Lapin Agile?”

“Isn’t that the cabaret where Picasso, Utrillo, and Modigliani hung out?”

“Yeah, but those cool days are over. Let’s make tracks, I’m hungry for a croque-monsieur,” Les said with a big grin. “We’ll stop at a brasserie in Montmartre, then take in a show at the Cabaret Au Lapin Agile.”



Tchog-tas-sáb-bee, Black Dog, Chief of the Osage, 1834 – Painting by George Catlin, Smithsonian American Art Museum

We are friends. We must assist each other to bear our burdens.

— Osage Proverb