

Introduction

SINCE THE EXPLORATORY JOURNEY of Lewis and Clark to the Pacific Coast early in the nineteenth century, the number of published accounts describing the “opening” of the American West has risen into the thousands. The greatest concentration of recorded experience and observation came out of the thirty-year span between 1860 and 1890—the period covered by this book. It was an incredible era of violence, greed, audacity, sentimentality, undirected exuberance, and an almost reverential attitude toward the ideal of personal freedom for those who already had it.

During that time the culture and civilization of the American Indian was destroyed, and out of that time came virtually all the great myths of the American West—tales of fur traders, mountain men, steamboat pilots, goldseekers, gamblers, gunmen, cavalrymen, cowboys, harlots, missionaries, schoolmarms, and homesteaders. Only occasionally was the voice of an Indian heard, and then more often than not it was recorded by the pen of a white man. The Indian was the dark menace of the myths, and even if he had known how to write in English, where would he have found a printer or a publisher?

Yet they are not all lost, those Indian voices of the past. A few authentic accounts of American western history were recorded by Indians either in pictographs or in translated English, and some managed to get published in obscure journals, pamphlets, or books of small circulation. In the late nineteenth century, when the white man’s curiosity about Indian survivors of the wars reached a high point, enterprising newspaper reporters frequently interviewed warriors and chiefs and gave them an opportunity to express their opinions on what was happening in the West. The quality of these interviews varied greatly, depending upon the abilities of the interpreters, or upon the inclination of the Indians to speak freely. Some feared reprisals for telling the truth, while others

delighted in hoaxing reporters with tall tales and shaggy-dog stories. Contemporary newspaper statements by Indians must therefore be read with skepticism, although some of them are masterpieces of irony and others burn with outbursts of poetic fury.

Among the richest sources of first-person statements by Indians are the records of treaty councils and other formal meetings with civilian and military representatives of the United States government. Isaac Pitman's new stenographic system was coming into vogue during the second half of the nineteenth century, and when Indians spoke in council a recording clerk sat beside the official interpreter.

Even when the meetings were in remote parts of the West, someone usually was available to write down the speeches, and because of the slowness of the translation process, much of what was said could be recorded in longhand. Interpreters quite often were half-bloods who knew spoken languages but seldom could read or write. Like most oral peoples they and the Indians depended upon imagery to express their thoughts, so that the English translations were filled with graphic similes and metaphors of the natural world. If an eloquent Indian had a poor interpreter, his words might be transformed to flat prose, but a good interpreter could make a poor speaker sound poetic.

Most Indian leaders spoke freely and candidly in councils with white officials, and as they became more sophisticated in such matters during the 1870's and 1880's, they demanded the right to choose their own interpreters and recorders. In this latter period, all members of the tribes were free to speak, and some of the older men chose such opportunities to recount events they had witnessed in the past, or to sum up the histories of their peoples. Although the Indians who lived through this doom period of their civilization have vanished from the earth, millions of their words are preserved in official records. Many of the more important council proceedings were published in government documents and reports.

Out of all these sources of almost forgotten oral history, I have tried to

fashion a narrative of the conquest of the American West as the victims experienced it, using their own words whenever possible. Americans who have always looked westward when reading about this period should read this book facing eastward.

This is not a cheerful book, but history has a way of intruding upon the present, and perhaps those who read it will have a clearer understanding of what the American Indian is, by knowing what he was. They may be surprised to hear words of gentle reasonableness coming from the mouths of Indians stereotyped in the American myth as ruthless savages. They may learn something about their own relationship to the earth from a people who were true conservationists. The Indians knew that life was equated with the earth and its resources, that America was a paradise, and they could not comprehend why the intruders from the East were determined to destroy all that was Indian as well as America itself.

And if the readers of this book should ever chance to see the poverty, the hopelessness, and the squalor of a modern Indian reservation, they may find it possible to truly understand the reasons why.

Urbana, Illinois

April, 1970

Dee Brown

I shall not be there. I shall rise and pass. Bury my heart at Wounded Knee.

—STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

ONE

“Their Manners Are Decorous and Praiseworthy”

Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the Mohican, the Pokanoket, and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice and the oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun.

Will we let ourselves be destroyed in our turn without a struggle, give up our homes, our country bequeathed to us by the Great Spirit, the graves of our dead and everything that is dear and sacred to us? I know you will cry with me, “Never! Never!”

—TECUMSEH OF THE SHAWNEES

IT BEGAN WITH CHRISTOPHER Columbus, who gave the people the name *Indios*. Those Europeans, the white men, spoke in different dialects, and some pronounced the word *Indien*, or *Indianer*, or *Indian*. *Peaux-rouges*, or *redskins*, came later. As was the custom of the people when receiving strangers, the Tainos on the island of San Salvador generously presented Columbus and his men with gifts and treated them with honor.

“So tractable, so peaceable, are these people,” Columbus wrote to the King and Queen of Spain, “that I swear to your Majesties there is not in the world a better nation. They love their neighbors as themselves, and their discourse is ever sweet and gentle, and accompanied with a smile; and though it is true that they are naked, yet their manners are decorous and praiseworthy.”

All this, of course, was taken as a sign of weakness, if not heathenism, and

Columbus being a righteous European was convinced the people should be “made to work, sow and do all that is necessary and to *adopt our ways*.” Over the next four centuries (1492–1890) several million Europeans and their descendants undertook to enforce their ways upon the people of the New World.

Columbus kidnapped ten of his friendly Taino hosts and carried them off to Spain, where they could be introduced to the white man’s ways. One of them died soon after arriving there, but not before he was baptized a Christian. The Spaniards were so pleased that they had made it possible for the first Indian to enter heaven that they hastened to spread the good news throughout the West Indies.

The Tainos and other Arawak people did not resist conversion to the Europeans’ religion, but they did resist strongly when hordes of these bearded strangers began scouring their islands in search of gold and precious stones. The Spaniards looted and burned villages; they kidnapped hundreds of men, women, and children and shipped them to Europe to be sold as slaves. Arawak resistance brought on the use of guns and sabers, and whole tribes were destroyed, hundreds of thousands of people in less than a decade after Columbus set foot on the beach of San Salvador, October 12, 1492.

Communications between the tribes of the New World were slow, and news of the Europeans’ barbarities rarely overtook the rapid spread of new conquests and settlements. Long before the English-speaking white men arrived in Virginia in 1607, however, the Powhatans had heard rumors about the civilizing techniques of the Spaniards. The Englishmen used subtler methods. To ensure peace long enough to establish a settlement at Jamestown, they put a golden crown upon the head of Wahunsonacook, dubbed him King Powhatan, and convinced him that he should put his people to work supplying the white settlers with food. Wahunsonacook vacillated between loyalty to his rebellious subjects and to the English, but after John Rolfe married his daughter, Pocahontas, he apparently decided that he was more English than Indian. After Wahunsonacook died, the Powhatans rose up in revenge to drive the Englishmen back into the sea

from which they had come, but the Indians underestimated the power of English weapons. In a short time the eight thousand Powhatans were reduced to less than a thousand.

In Massachusetts the story began somewhat differently but ended virtually the same as in Virginia. After the Englishmen landed at Plymouth in 1620, most of them probably would have starved to death but for aid received from friendly natives of the New World. A Pemaquid named Samoset and three Wampanoags named Massasoit, Squanto, and Hobomah became self-appointed missionaries to the Pilgrims. All spoke some English, learned from explorers who had touched ashore in previous years. Squanto had been kidnapped by an English seaman who sold him into slavery in Spain, but he escaped through the aid of another Englishman and finally managed to return home. He and the other Indians regarded the Plymouth colonists as helpless children; they shared corn with them from the tribal stores, showed them where and how to catch fish, and got them through the first winter. When spring came they gave the white men some seed corn and showed them how to plant and cultivate it.

For several years these Englishmen and their Indian neighbors lived in peace, but many more shiploads of white people continued coming ashore. The ring of axes and the crash of falling trees echoed up and down the coasts of the land which the white men now called New England. Settlements began crowding in upon each other. In 1625 some of the colonists asked Samoset to give them 12,000 additional acres of Pemaquid land. Samoset knew that land came from the Great Spirit, was as endless as the sky, and belonged to no man. To humor these strangers in their strange ways, however, he went through a ceremony of transferring the land and made his mark on a paper for them. It was the first deed of Indian land to English colonists.

Most of the other settlers, coming in by thousands now, did not bother to go through such a ceremony. By the time Massasoit, great chief of the Wampanoags, died in 1662 his people were being pushed back into the wilderness. His son Metacom foresaw doom for all Indians unless they united to

resist the invaders. Although the New Englanders flattered Metacom by crowning him King Philip of Pokanoket, he devoted most of his time to forming alliances with the Narragansetts and other tribes in the region.

In 1675, after a series of arrogant actions by the colonists, King Philip led his Indian confederacy into a war meant to save the tribes from extinction. The Indians attacked fifty-two settlements, completely destroying twelve of them, but after months of fighting, the firepower of the colonists virtually exterminated the Wampanoags and Narragansetts. King Philip was killed and his head publicly exhibited at Plymouth for twenty years. Along with other captured Indian women and children, his wife and young son were sold into slavery in the West Indies.

When the Dutch came to Manhattan Island, Peter Minuit purchased it for sixty guilders in fishhooks and glass beads, but encouraged the Indians to remain and continue exchanging their valuable peltries for such trinkets. In 1641, Willem Kieft levied tribute upon the Mahicans and sent soldiers to Staten Island to punish the Raritans for offenses which had been committed not by them but by white settlers. The Raritans resisted arrest, and the soldiers killed four of them. When the Indians retaliated by killing four Dutchmen, Kieft ordered the massacre of two entire villages while the inhabitants slept. The Dutch soldiers ran their bayonets through men, women, and children, hacked their bodies to pieces, and then leveled the villages with fire.

For two more centuries these events were repeated again and again as the European colonists moved inland through the passes of the Alleghenies and down the westward-flowing rivers to the Great Waters (the Mississippi) and then up the Great Muddy (the Missouri).

The Five Nations of the Iroquois, mightiest and most advanced of all the eastern tribes, strove in vain for peace. After years of bloodshed to save their political independence, they finally went down to defeat. Some escaped to Canada, some fled westward, some lived out their lives in reservation confinement.

During the 1760's Pontiac of the Ottawas united tribes in the Great Lakes country in hopes of driving the British back across the Alleghenies, but he failed. His major error was an alliance with French-speaking white men who withdrew aid from the *peaux-rouges* during the crucial siege of Detroit.

A generation later, Tecumseh of the Shawnees formed a great confederacy of midwestern and southern tribes to protect their lands from invasion. The dream ended with Tecumseh's death in battle during the War of 1812.

Between 1795 and 1840 the Miamis fought battle after battle, and signed treaty after treaty, ceding their rich Ohio Valley lands until there was none left to cede.

When white settlers began streaming into the Illinois country after the War of 1812, the Sauks and Foxes fled across the Mississippi. A subordinate chief, Black Hawk, refused to retreat. He created an alliance with the Winnebagos, Pottawotamies, and Kickapoos, and declared war against the new settlements. A band of Winnebagos, who accepted a white soldier chief's bribe of twenty horses and a hundred dollars, betrayed Black Hawk, and he was captured in 1832. He was taken East for imprisonment and display to the curious. After he died in 1838, the governor of the recently created Iowa Territory obtained Black Hawk's skeleton and kept it on view in his office.

In 1829, Andrew Jackson, who was called Sharp Knife by the Indians, took office as President of the United States. During his frontier career, Sharp Knife and his soldiers had slain thousands of Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles, but these southern Indians were still numerous and clung stubbornly to their tribal lands, which had been assigned them forever by white men's treaties. In Sharp Knife's first message to his Congress, he recommended that all these Indians be removed westward beyond the Mississippi. "I suggest the propriety of setting apart an ample district west of the Mississippi ... to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes, as long as they shall occupy it."

Although enactment of such a law would only add to the long list of broken promises made to the eastern Indians, Sharp Knife was convinced that Indians

and whites could not live together in peace and that his plan would make possible a final promise which never would be broken again. On May 28, 1830, Sharp Knife's recommendations became law.

Two years later he appointed a commissioner of Indian affairs to serve in the War Department and see that the new laws affecting Indians were properly carried out. And then on June 30, 1834, Congress passed *An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes and to Preserve Peace on the Frontiers*. All that part of the United States west of the Mississippi "and not within the States of Missouri and Louisiana or the Territory of Arkansas" would be Indian country. No white persons would be permitted to trade in the Indian country without a license. No white traders of bad character would be permitted to reside in Indian country. No white persons would be permitted to settle in the Indian country. The military force of the United States would be employed in the apprehension of any white person who was found in violation of provisions of the act.

Before these laws could be put into effect, a new wave of white settlers swept westward and formed the territories of Wisconsin and Iowa. This made it necessary for the policy makers in Washington to shift the "permanent Indian frontier" from the Mississippi River to the 95th meridian. (This line ran from Lake of the Woods on what is now the Minnesota-Canada border, slicing southward through what are now the states of Minnesota and Iowa, and then along the western borders of Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana, to Galveston Bay, Texas.) To keep the Indians beyond the 95th meridian and to prevent unauthorized white men from crossing it, soldiers were garrisoned in a series of military posts that ran southward from Fort Snelling on the Mississippi River to forts Atkinson and Leavenworth on the Missouri, forts Gibson and Smith on the Arkansas, Fort Towson on the Red, and Fort Jesup in Louisiana.

More than three centuries had now passed since Christopher Columbus landed on San Salvador, more than two centuries since the English colonists came to Virginia and New England. In that time the friendly Tainos who

welcomed Columbus ashore had been utterly obliterated. Long before the last of the Tainos died, their simple agricultural and handicraft culture was destroyed and replaced by cotton plantations worked by slaves. The white colonists chopped down the tropical forests to enlarge their fields; the cotton plants exhausted the soil; winds unbroken by a forest shield covered the fields with sand. When Columbus first saw the island he described it as “very big and very level and the trees very green ... the whole of it so green that it is a pleasure to gaze upon.” The Europeans who followed him there destroyed its vegetation and its inhabitants—human, animal, bird, and fish—and after turning it into a wasteland, they abandoned it.

On the mainland of America, the Wampanoags of Massasoit and King Philip had vanished, along with the Chesapeake, the Chickahominys, and the Potomacs of the great Powhatan confederacy. (Only Pocahontas was remembered.) Scattered or reduced to remnants were the Pequots, Montauks, Nanticokes, Machapungas, Catawbas, Cheraws, Miamis, Hurons, Eries, Mohawks, Senecas, and Mohegans. (Only Uncas was remembered.) Their musical names remained forever fixed on the American land, but their bones were forgotten in a thousand burned villages or lost in forests fast disappearing before the axes of twenty million invaders. Already the once sweet-watered streams, most of which bore Indian names, were clouded with silt and the wastes of man; the very earth was being ravaged and squandered. To the Indians it seemed that these Europeans hated everything in nature—the living forests and their birds and beasts, the grassy glades, the water, the soil, and the air itself.

The decade following establishment of the “permanent Indian frontier” was a bad time for the eastern tribes. The great Cherokee nation had survived more than a hundred years of the white man’s wars, diseases, and whiskey, but now it was to be blotted out. Because the Cherokees numbered several thousands, their removal to the West was planned to be in gradual stages, but discovery of Appalachian gold within their territory brought on a clamor for their immediate

wholesale exodus. During the autumn of 1838, General Winfield Scott's soldiers rounded them up and concentrated them into camps. (A few hundred escaped to the Smoky Mountains and many years later were given a small reservation in North Carolina.) From the prison camps they were started westward to Indian Territory. On the long winter trek, one of every four Cherokees died from cold, hunger, or disease. They called the march their "trail of tears." The Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles also gave up their homelands in the South. In the North, surviving remnants of the Shawnees, Miamis, Ottawas, Hurons, Delawares, and many other once mighty tribes walked or traveled by horseback and wagon beyond the Mississippi, carrying their shabby goods, their rusty farming tools, and bags of seed corn. All of them arrived as refugees, poor relations, in the country of the proud and free Plains Indians.

Scarcely were the refugees settled behind the security of the "permanent Indian frontier" when soldiers began marching westward through the Indian country. The white men of the United States—who talked so much of peace but rarely seemed to practice it—were marching to war with the white men who had conquered the Indians of Mexico. When the war with Mexico ended in 1847, the United States took possession of a vast expanse of territory reaching from Texas to California. All of it was west of the "permanent Indian frontier."

In 1848 gold was discovered in California. Within a few months, fortune-seeking easterners by the thousands were crossing the Indian Territory. Indians who lived or hunted along the Santa Fe and Oregon trails had grown accustomed to seeing an occasional wagon train licensed for traders, trappers, or missionaries. Now suddenly the trails were filled with wagons, and the wagons were filled with white people. Most of them were bound for California gold, but some turned southwest for New Mexico or northwest for the Oregon country.

To justify these breaches of the "permanent Indian frontier," the policy makers in Washington invented Manifest Destiny, a term which lifted land hunger to a lofty plane. The Europeans and their descendants were ordained by destiny to rule all of America. They were the dominant race and therefore

responsible for the Indians—along with their lands, their forests, and their mineral wealth. Only the New Englanders, who had destroyed or driven out all their Indians, spoke against Manifest Destiny.

In 1850, although none of the Modocs, Mohaves, Paiutes, Shastas, Yumas, or a hundred other lesser-known tribes along the Pacific Coast were consulted on the matter, California became the thirty-first state of the Union. In the mountains of Colorado gold was discovered, and new hordes of prospectors swarmed across the Plains. Two vast new territories were organized, Kansas and Nebraska, encompassing virtually all the country of the Plains tribes. In 1858 Minnesota became a state, its boundaries being extended a hundred miles beyond the 95th meridian, the “permanent Indian frontier.”

And so only a quarter of a century after enactment of Sharp Knife Andrew Jackson’s Indian Trade and Intercourse Act, white settlers had driven in both the north and south flanks of the 95th meridian line, and advance elements of white miners and traders had penetrated the center.

It was then, at the beginning of the 1860’s, that the white men of the United States went to war with one another—the Bluecoats against the Graycoats, the great Civil War. In 1860 there were probably 300,000 Indians in the United States and Territories, most of them living west of the Mississippi. According to varying estimates, their numbers had been reduced by one-half to two-thirds since the arrival of the first settlers in Virginia and New England. The survivors were now pressed between expanding white populations on the East and along the Pacific coasts—more than thirty million Europeans and their descendants. If the remaining free tribes believed that the white man’s Civil War would bring any respite from his pressures for territory, they were soon disillusioned.

The most numerous and powerful western tribe was the Sioux, or Dakota, which was separated into several subdivisions. The Santee Sioux lived in the woodlands of Minnesota, and for some years had been retreating before the advance of settlements. Little Crow of the Mdewkanton Santee, after being taken

on a tour of eastern cities, was convinced that the power of the United States could not be resisted. He was reluctantly attempting to lead his tribe down the white man's road. Wabasha, another Santee leader, also had accepted the inevitable, but both he and Little Crow were determined to oppose any further surrender of their lands.

Farther west on the Great Plains were the Teton Sioux, horse Indians all, and completely free. They were somewhat contemptuous of their woodland Santee cousins who had capitulated to the settlers. Most numerous and most confident of their ability to defend their territory were the Oglala Teton. At the beginning of the white man's Civil War, their outstanding leader was Red Cloud, thirty-eight years old, a shrewd warrior chief. Still too young to be a warrior was Crazy Horse, an intelligent and fearless teen-aged Oglala.

Among the Hunkpapas, a smaller division of the Teton Sioux, a young man in his mid-twenties had already won a reputation as a hunter and warrior. In tribal councils he advocated unyielding opposition to any intrusion by white men. He was Tatanka Yotanka, the Sitting Bull. He was mentor to an orphaned boy named Gall. Together with Crazy Horse of the Oglalas, they would make history sixteen years later in 1876.

Although he was not yet forty, Spotted Tail was already the chief spokesman for the Brulé Teton, who lived on the far western plains. Spotted Tail was a handsome, smiling Indian who loved fine feasts and compliant women. He enjoyed his way of life and the land he lived upon, but was willing to compromise to avoid war.

Closely associated with the Teton Sioux were the Cheyennes. In the old days the Cheyennes had lived in the Minnesota country of the Santee Sioux, but gradually moved westward and acquired horses. Now the Northern Cheyennes shared the Powder River and the Bighorn country with the Sioux, frequently camping near them. Dull Knife, in his forties, was an outstanding leader of the Northern branch of the tribe. (To his own people Dull Knife was known as Morning Star, but the Sioux called him Dull Knife, and most contemporary

accounts use that name.)

The Southern Cheyennes had drifted below the Platte River, establishing villages on the Colorado and Kansas plains. Black Kettle of the Southern branch had been a great warrior in his youth. In his late middle age, he was the acknowledged chief, but the younger men and the Hotamitaneos (Dog Soldiers) of the Southern Cheyennes were more inclined to follow leaders such as Tall Bull and Roman Nose, who were in their prime.

The Arapahos were old associates of the Cheyennes and lived in the same areas. Some remained with the Northern Cheyennes, others followed the Southern branch. Little Raven, in his forties, was at this time the best-known chief.

South of the Kansas-Nebraska buffalo ranges were the Kiowas. Some of the older Kiowas could remember the Black Hills, but the tribe had been pushed southward before the combined power of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. By 1860 the Kiowas had made their peace with the northern plains tribes and had become allies of the Comanches, whose southern plains they had entered. The Kiowas had several great leaders—an aging chief, Satank; two vigorous fighting men in their thirties, Satanta and Lone Wolf; and an intelligent statesman, Kicking Bird.

The Comanches, constantly on the move and divided into many small bands, lacked the leadership of their allies. Ten Bears, very old, was more a poet than a warrior chief. In 1860, half-breed Quanah Parker, who would lead the Comanches in a last great struggle to save their buffalo range, was not yet twenty years old.

In the arid Southwest were the Apaches, veterans of 250 years of guerrilla warfare with the Spaniards, who taught them the finer arts of torture and mutilation but never subdued them. Although few in number—probably not more than six thousand divided into several bands—their reputation as tenacious defenders of their harsh and pitiless land was already well established. Mangas Colorado, in his late sixties, had signed a treaty of friendship with the United

States, but was already disillusioned by the influx of miners and soldiers into his territory. Cochise, his son-in-law, still believed he could get along with the white Americans. Victorio and Delshay distrusted the white intruders and gave them a wide berth. Nana, in his fifties but tough as rawhide, considered the English-speaking white men no different from the Spanish-speaking Mexicans he had been fighting all his life. Geronimo, in his twenties, had not yet proved himself.

The Navahos were related to the Apaches, but most Navahos had taken the Spanish white man's road and were raising sheep and goats, cultivating grain and fruit. As stockmen and weavers, some bands of the tribe had grown wealthy. Other Navahos continued as nomads, raiding their old enemies the Pueblos, the white settlers, or prosperous members of their own tribe. Manuelito, a stalwart mustachioed stock raiser, was head chief—chosen by an election of the Navahos held in 1855. In 1859, when a few wild Navahos raided United States citizens in their territory, the U.S. Army retaliated not by hunting down the culprits but by destroying the hogans and shooting all the livestock belonging to Manuelito and members of his band. By 1860, Manuelito and some Navaho followers were engaged in an undeclared war with the United States in northern New Mexico and Arizona.

In the Rockies north of the Apache and Navaho country were the Utes, an aggressive mountain tribe inclined to raid their more peaceful neighbors to the south. Ouray, their best-known leader, favored peace with white men even to the point of soldiering with them as mercenaries against other Indian tribes.

In the far West most of the tribes were too small, too divided, or too weak to offer much resistance. The Modocs of northern California and southern Oregon, numbering less than a thousand, fought guerrilla-fashion for their lands. Kintpuash, called Captain Jack by the California settlers, was only a young man in 1860; his ordeal as a leader would come a dozen years later.

Northwest of the Modocs, the Nez Percés had been living in peace with white men since Lewis and Clark passed through their territory in 1805. In 1855, one branch of the tribe ceded Nez Percé lands to the United States for settlement,

and agreed to live within the confines of a large reservation. Other bands of the tribe continued to roam between the Blue Mountains of Oregon and the Bitterroots of Idaho. Because of the vastness of the Northwest country, the Nez Percés believed there would always be land enough for both white men and Indians to use as each saw fit. Heinmot Tooyalaket, later known as Chief Joseph, would have to make a fateful decision in 1877 between peace and war. In 1860 he was twenty years old, the son of a chief.

In the Nevada country of the Paiutes a future Messiah named Wovoka, who later would have a brief but powerful influence upon the Indians of the West, was only four years old in 1860.

During the following thirty years these leaders and many more would enter into history and legend. Their names would become as well known as those of the men who tried to destroy them. Most of them, young and old, would be driven into the ground long before the symbolic end of Indian freedom came at Wounded Knee in December, 1890. Now, a century later, in an age without heroes, they are perhaps the most heroic of all Americans.

TWO

The Long Walk of the Navahos

1860—March 12, U.S. Congress passes Pre-emption Bill, providing free land to settlers in western territories. April 3, first Pony Express leaves St. Joseph, Missouri; delivers letters at Sacramento, California, April 13. April 23, Democratic National Convention at Charleston, South Carolina, divides on the slavery issue. May 16–18, Republican National Convention in Chicago nominates Abraham Lincoln for President. June, population of U.S. reaches 31,443,321. July, Spencer repeating rifle invented. November 6, Abraham Lincoln receives only 40 percent of popular vote but wins Presidency. December 20, South Carolina secedes from the Union.

1861—February 4, Confederate Congress organized at Montgomery, Alabama. February 9, Jefferson Davis elected President of Confederate States. February 11, Abraham Lincoln says farewell to friends and neighbors at Springfield, Illinois, and leaves by train for Washington. March, President Davis asks for 100,000 soldiers to defend the Confederacy. April 12, Confederates open fire on Fort Sumter. April 14, Fort Sumter falls. April 15, President Lincoln calls for 75,000 volunteer soldiers. July 21, First Battle of Bull Run; Union Army falls back on Washington. October 6, rioting Russian students close down University of St. Petersburg. October 25, Pacific Telegraph line between St. Louis and San Francisco completed. December 5, Gatling gun is patented. December 14, British mourn death of Albert, Prince Consort of Queen Victoria. December 30, U.S. banks suspend gold payments.

When our fathers lived they heard that the Americans were coming across the great river westward. ... We heard of guns and powder and lead—first flintlocks, then percussion caps, and now repeating rifles. We first saw the Americans at Cottonwood Wash. We had wars with the Mexicans and the Pueblos. We captured mules from the Mexicans, and had many mules. The Americans came to trade with us. When the Americans first came we had a big dance, and they danced with our women. We also traded.

—MANUELITO OF THE NAVAHO

MANUELITO AND OTHER NAVAHO leaders made treaties with the Americans. “Then the soldiers built the fort here,” Manuelito remembered, “and gave us an agent who advised us to behave well. He told us to live peaceably with the whites; to keep our promises. They wrote down the promises, so that we would always remember them.” ¹

Manuelito tried to keep the promises in the treaty, but after the soldiers came and burned his hogans and killed his livestock because of something a few wild young Navahos had done, he grew angry at the Americans. He and his band had been wealthy, but the soldiers had made them poor. To become *ricos* again they must raid the Mexicans to the south, and for this the Mexicans called them *ladrones*, or thieves. For as long as anyone could remember, the Mexicans had been raiding Navahos to steal their young children and make slaves of them, and for as long as anyone could remember the Navahos had been retaliating with raids against the Mexicans.

After the Americans came to Santa Fe and called the country New Mexico, they protected the Mexicans because they had become American citizens. The Navahos were not citizens because they were Indians, and when they raided the Mexicans, soldiers would come rushing into the Navaho country to punish them as outlaws. This was all an angry puzzle to Manuelito and his people, for they

knew that many of the Mexicans had Indian blood, and yet no soldiers ever went rushing after the Mexicans to punish them for stealing Navaho children.

The first fort the Americans built in the Navaho country was in a grassy valley at the mouth of Canyon Bonito. They called it Fort Defiance, and put their horses out to graze on pastureland long prized by Manuelito and his people. The soldier chief told the Navahos that the pastures belonged to the fort, and ordered them to keep their animals away. Because there was no fencing, the Navahos could not prevent their livestock from straying to the forbidden meadows. One morning a company of mounted soldiers rode out of the fort and shot all the animals belonging to the Navahos.

To replace their horses and mules, the Navahos raided the soldiers' herds and supply trains. The soldiers in turn began attacking bands of Navahos. In February, 1860, Manuelito led five hundred warriors against the Army's horse herd, which was grazing a few miles north of Fort Defiance. The Navaho lances and arrows were no match for the well-armed soldier guard. They suffered more than thirty casualties but captured only a few horses. During the following weeks, Manuelito and his ally Barboncito built up a force of more than a thousand warriors, and in the darkness of the early hours of April 30, they surrounded Fort Defiance. Two hours before dawn, the Navahos attacked the fort from three sides. They were determined to wipe it off the face of their land.

They came very near succeeding. With a rattle of fire from their few old Spanish guns, the Navahos drove in the sentries and overran several buildings. As startled soldiers poured from their barracks, they met showers of arrows, but after several minutes of confusion the soldiers formed files and soon commenced a steady musket fire. When daylight came, the Navahos pulled back into the hills, satisfied that they had taught the soldiers a good lesson.

The United States Army, however, considered the attack a challenge of the flag flying over Fort Defiance, an act of war. A few weeks later Colonel Edward Richard Sprigg Canby, at the head of six companies of cavalry and nine of infantry, was scouring the Chuska Mountains in search of Manuelito's hostiles.

The troops marched through the redrock country until they wore out their horses and almost died of thirst. Although they seldom saw any Navahos, the Indians were there, harassing the column's flanks but making no direct attacks. By the end of the year, both sides grew weary of the foolish game. The soldiers were unable to punish the Navahos, and the Navahos were unable to attend to their crops and livestock.

In January, 1861, Manuelito, Barboncito, Herrero Grande, Armijo, Delgadito, and other *rico* leaders agreed to meet Colonel Canby at a new fort the soldiers were building thirty-five miles southeast of Fort Defiance. The new fort was called Fort Fauntleroy in honor of a soldier chief. At the end of the parleys with Canby, the Navahos chose Herrero Grande as head chief (February 21, 1861). The leaders agreed that it was best to live in peace, and Herrero Grande promised to drive all *ladrones* from the tribe. Manuelito was not sure that this promise could be carried out, but he signed his name to Canby's paper. A prosperous stockraiser again, he believed in the virtues of peace and honesty.

After the winter meeting at Fort Fauntleroy, there were several months of friendship between the soldiers and the Navahos. Rumors reached the Indians of a big war somewhere far to the east, a war between the white Americans of the North and South. They learned that some of Canby's soldiers had exchanged their bluecoats for Graycoats and gone East to fight against the Bluecoat soldiers there. One of them was the Eagle Chief, Colonel Thomas Fauntleroy; his name was blotted out, and now they called the post Fort Wingate.

In this time of friendship, the Navahos went often to Fort Fauntleroy (Wingate) to trade and draw rations from their agent. Most of the soldiers made them welcome, and a custom grew up of having horse races between the Navahos and the soldiers. All the Navahos looked forward to these contests, and on racing days hundreds of men, women, and children would dress in their brightest costumes and ride their finest ponies to Fort Wingate. On a crisp sunny morning in September several races were run, but the special race of the day was scheduled at noon. It was to be between Pistol Bullet (a name given Manuelito

by the soldiers) on a Navaho pony, and a lieutenant on a quarter horse. Many bets were made on this race—money, blankets, livestock, beads, whatever a man had to use for a bet. The horses jumped off together, but in a few seconds everyone could see that Pistol Bullet (Manuelito) was in trouble. He lost control of his pony, and it ran off the track. Soon everyone knew that Pistol Bullet's bridle rein had been slashed with a knife. The Navahos went to the judges—who were all soldiers—and demanded that the race be run again. The judges refused; they declared the lieutenant's quarter horse was the winner. Immediately the soldiers formed a victory parade for a march into the fort to collect their bets.



1. *Manuelito, chief of the Navahos, painted by Julian Scott for the United States Census Bureau in 1891.*

Infuriated by this trickery, the Navahos stormed after them, but the fort's gates were slammed shut in their faces. When a Navaho attempted to force an entrance, a sentinel shot him dead.

What happened next was written down by a white soldier chief, Captain Nicholas Hodt:

The Navahos, squaws, and children ran in all directions and were shot

and bayoneted. I succeeded in forming about twenty men. ... I then marched out to the east side of the post; there I saw a soldier murdering two little children and a woman. I halloed immediately to the soldier to stop. He looked up, but did not obey my order. I ran up as quick as I could, but could not get there soon enough to prevent him from killing the two innocent children and wounding severely the squaw. I ordered his belts to be taken off and taken prisoner to the post. ... Meanwhile the colonel had given orders to the officer of the day to have the artillery [mountain howitzers] brought out to open upon the Indians. The sergeant in charge of the mountain howitzers pretended not to understand the order given, for he considered it as an unlawful order; but being cursed by the officer of the day, and threatened, he had to execute the order or else get himself in trouble. The Indians scattered all over the valley below the post, attacked the post herd, wounded the Mexican herder, but did not succeed in getting any stock; also attacked the expressman some ten miles from the post, took his horse and mail-bag and wounded him in the arm. After the massacre there were no more Indians to be seen about the post with the exception of a few squaws, favorites of the officers. The commanding officer endeavored to make peace again with the Navahos by sending some of the favorite squaws to talk with the chiefs; but the only satisfaction the squaws received was a good flogging. [2](#)



2. Juanita, wife of Manuelito, as a member of the Navaho delegation to Washington in 1874. Photo from the Smithsonian Institution.

After that day, September 22, 1861, it was a long time before there was friendship again between white men and Navahos.

Meanwhile an army of Confederate Graycoats had marched into New Mexico and fought big battles with the Bluecoats along the Rio Grande. Kit Carson, the Rope Thrower, was a leader of the Bluecoats. Most of the Navahos trusted Rope Thrower Carson because he had always talked one way to the Indians and they hoped to make peace with him when he was finished with the Graycoats.

In the spring of 1862, however, many more Bluecoats came marching into New Mexico from the west. They called themselves the California Column. Their General James Carleton wore stars on his shoulders and was more

powerful than the Eagle Chief, Carson. These Californians camped along the Rio Grande Valley, but they had nothing to do because the Graycoats had all fled into Texas.

The Navahos soon learned that Star Chief Carleton had a great hunger for their land and whatever metal wealth might be hidden under it. “A princely realm,” he called it, “a magnificent pastoral and mineral country.” As he had many soldiers with nothing to do but march around their parade grounds rattling their guns, Carleton began looking about for Indians to fight. The Navahos, he said, were “wolves that run through the mountains” and must be subdued.

Carleton turned his attention first to the Mescalero Apaches, who numbered less than a thousand and lived in scattered bands between the Rio Grande and the Pecos. His plan was to kill or capture all Mescaleros and then confine the survivors on a worthless reservation along the Pecos. This would leave the rich Rio Grande Valley open for land claims and settlement by American citizens. In September, 1862, he sent out an order:

There is to be no council held with the Indians, nor any talks. The men are to be slain whenever and wherever they can be found. The women and children may be taken as prisoners, but, of course, they are not to be killed.

[3](#)

This was not Kit Carson’s way of dealing with Indians, many of whom he counted as friends from his trading days. He sent his soldiers into the mountains, but he also opened up lines of communication with the Mescalero leaders. By late autumn he had arranged for five chiefs to visit Santa Fe and negotiate with General Carleton. While en route to Santa Fe, two of the chiefs and their escorts met a detachment of soldiers under command of a former saloonkeeper, Captain James (Paddy) Graydon. Graydon pretended great friendship for the Mescaleros, giving them flour and beef for their long journey. A short time later, near Gallina Springs, Graydon’s scouting party came upon the Mescaleros again. What

happened there is not clear, because no Mescalero survived the incident. A white soldier chief, Major Arthur Morrison, reported briefly: “The transaction was very strangely committed by Captain Graydon ... and from what I can learn he deceived these Indians, going right into their camp and giving them liquor, afterwards shot them down, they of course thinking him to come with friendly purposes, as he had given them flour, beef, and provisions.”

The other three chiefs, Cadette, Chato, and Estrella, reached Santa Fe and assured General Carleton that their people were at peace with the white men and wanted only to be left alone in their mountains. “You are stronger than we,” Cadette said. “We have fought you so long as we had rifles and powder; but your arms are better than ours. Give us like weapons and turn us loose, we will fight you again; but we are worn-out; we have no more heart; we have no provisions, no means to live; your troops are everywhere; our springs and water holes are either occupied or overlooked by your young men. You have driven us from our last and best stronghold, and we have no more heart. Do with us as may seem good to you, but do not forget we are men and braves.” ⁴

Carleton haughtily informed them that the only way the Mescaleros could achieve peace would be to leave their country and go to the Bosque Redondo, the reservation he had prepared for them on the Pecos. There they would be kept in confinement by soldiers at a new military post called Fort Sumner.

Outnumbered by the soldiers, unable to protect their women and children, and trusting in the goodwill of Rope Thrower Carson, the Mescalero chiefs submitted to Carleton’s demands and took their people into imprisonment at Bosque Redondo.

With some uneasiness, the Navahos had been watching Carleton’s quick and ruthless conquest of their cousins, the Mescalero Apaches. In December, eighteen of the *rico* leaders—including Delgadito and Barboncito, but not Manuelito—traveled to Santa Fe to see the general. They told him they represented peaceful Navaho herdsmen and farmers who wanted no war. This was the first time they had looked upon Star Chief Carleton. His face was hairy,

his eyes were fierce, and his mouth was that of a man without humor. He did not smile when he told Delgadito and the others: “You can have no peace until you give other guarantees than your word that the peace should be kept. Go home and tell your people so. I have no faith in your promises.” ⁵

By the spring of 1863, most of the Mescaleros had either fled to Mexico or been herded into the Bosque Redondo. In April Carleton went to Fort Wingate “to gather information for a campaign against the Navahos as soon as the grass starts sufficiently to support stock.” He arranged a meeting with Delgadito and Barboncito near Cubero, and bluntly informed the chiefs that the only way they could prove their peaceful intentions would be to take their people out of the Navaho country and join the “contented” Mescaleros at Bosque Redondo. To this Barboncito replied: “I will not go to the Bosque. I will never leave my country, not even if it means that I will be killed.”

On June 23 Carleton set a deadline for Navaho removal to the Bosque Redondo. “Send for Delgadito and Barboncito again,” he instructed the commanding officer at Fort Wingate, “and repeat what I before told them, and tell them that I shall feel very sorry if they refuse to come in. ... Tell them they can have until the twentieth day of July of this year to come in—they and all those who belong to what they call the peace party; *that after that day every Navaho that is seen will be considered as hostile and treated accordingly*; that after that day the door now open will be closed.” ⁶ The twentieth of July came and went, but no Navahos volunteered to surrender.

In the meantime, Carleton had ordered Kit Carson to march his troops from the Mescalero country to Fort Wingate and prepare for a war against the Navahos. Carson was reluctant; he complained that he had volunteered to fight Confederate soldiers, not Indians, and he sent Carleton a letter of resignation.

Kit Carson liked Indians. In the old days he had lived with them for months at a time without seeing another white man. He had fathered a child by an Arapaho woman and had lived for a time with a Cheyenne woman. But after he married Josefa, daughter of Don Francisco Jaramillo of Taos, Carson had taken

new roads, grown prosperous, and claimed land for a ranch. He discovered that in New Mexico there was room at the top even for a rough, superstitious, illiterate mountain man. He learned to read and write a few words, and although he was only five feet six inches tall, his name touched the sky. Famous as he was, the Rope Thrower never overcame his awe of the well-dressed, smooth-talking men at the top. In 1863 in New Mexico the biggest man at the top was Star Chief Carleton. And so in the summer of that year Kit Carson withdrew his resignation from the Army and went to Fort Wingate to take the field against the Navahos. Before the campaign was over, his reports to Carleton were echoing the Manifest Destiny presumptions of the arrogant man from whom he took orders.

The Navahos respected Carson as a fighter, but they had no use for his soldiers—the New Mexico Volunteers. Many of them were Mexicans, and the Navahos had been chasing them out of their country as long as anyone could remember. There were ten times as many Navahos as Mescaleros, and they had the advantage of a vast and rugged country broken by deep canyons, steep-banked arroyos, and precipice-flanked mesas. Their stronghold was Canyon de Chelly, cutting westward for thirty miles from the Chuska Mountains. Narrowing in some places to fifty yards, the canyon's redrock walls rose a thousand feet or more, with overhanging ledges offering excellent defensive positions against invaders. At points where the canyon widened to several hundred yards, the Navahos grazed sheep and goats on pasturage, or raised corn, wheat, fruit, and melons on cultivated soil. They were especially proud of their peach orchards, carefully tended since the days of the Spaniards. Water flowed plentifully through the canyon for most of the year, and there were enough cottonwood and box-elder trees to supply wood for fuel.

Even when they learned that Carson had marched a thousand soldiers to Pueblo Colorado and had hired his old friends the Utes to serve as trackers, the Navahos were still scornful. The chiefs reminded their people of how in the old days they had driven the Spaniards from their land. "If the Americans come to

take us, we will kill them,” the chiefs promised, but they took precautions to secure the safety of their women and children. They knew the mercenary Utes would try to make captives of them for sale to wealthy Mexicans.

Late in July Carson moved up to Fort Defiance, renamed it for the Indians’ old adversary Canby, and began sending out reconnaissance detachments. He probably was not surprised that few Navahos could be found. He knew that the only way to conquer them was to destroy their crops and livestock—scorch their earth—and on July 25 he sent Major Joseph Cummings to bring in all livestock that could be found and to harvest or burn all corn and wheat along the Bonito. As soon as the Navahos discovered what Cummings was doing to their winter food supply, he became a marked man. A short time later a Navaho marksman shot him out of his saddle, killing him instantly. They also raided Carson’s corral near Fort Canby, recaptured some sheep and goats, and stole the Rope Thrower’s favorite horse.

General Carleton was far more nettled by such incidents than Carson, who had lived with Indians long enough to appreciate bold retorts. On August 18 the general decided to “stimulate the zeal” of his troops by posting prize money for captured Navaho livestock. He offered to pay twenty dollars for “every sound, serviceable horse or mule,” and one dollar per head for sheep brought in to the commissary at Fort Canby.

As the soldiers’ pay was less than twenty dollars per month, the bounty offer did stimulate them, and some of the men extended it to the few Navahos they were able to kill. To prove their soldierly abilities, they began cutting off the knot of hair fastened by a red string which the Navahos wore on their heads. The Navahos could not believe that Kit Carson condoned scalping, which they considered a barbaric custom introduced by the Spaniards. (The Europeans may or may not have introduced scalping to the New World, but the Spanish, French, Dutch, and English colonists made the custom popular by offering bounties for scalps of their respective enemies.)

Although Carson continued his steady destruction of grain fields, of bean

and pumpkin patches, he was moving too slowly to suit General Carleton. In September Carleton ordered that thenceforth every Navaho male was to be killed or taken prisoner on sight. He wrote out for Carson the exact words he was to use to captured Navahos: “Say to them—‘Go to the Bosque Redondo, or we will pursue and destroy you. We will not make peace with you on any other terms. ... This war shall be pursued against you if it takes years, now that we have begun, until you cease to exist or move. There can be no other talk on the subject.’”

About this same time the general was writing War Department headquarters in Washington, demanding an additional regiment of cavalry. More soldiers were needed, he said, because of a new gold strike not far west of the Navaho country, troops sufficient “to whip the Indians and to protect the people going to and at the mines. ... Providence has indeed blessed us ... the gold lies here at our feet to be had by the mere picking of it up!” [7](#)

Under Carleton’s obsessive prodding, Kit Carson accelerated his scorched-earth program, and by autumn had destroyed most of the herds and grain between Fort Canby and Canyon de Chelly. On October 17 two Navahos appeared under a truce flag at Fort Wingate. One of them was El Sordo, emissary for his brothers Delgadito and Barboncito and their five hundred followers. Their food supply was gone, El Sordo said; they were reduced to eating piñon nuts. They were almost naked of clothing and blankets, and were too fearful of soldiers’ scouting parties to build fires for warmth. They did not wish to go far away to the Bosque, but would build hogans nearby Fort Wingate, where they would always be under the eyes of the soldiers as peaceful Indians. In nine days Delgadito and Barboncito would come with the five hundred. The chiefs would be willing to go to Santa Fe to see the Star Chief and sue for peace.

Captain Rafael Chacon, commanding Fort Wingate, posted the compromise offer to General Carleton, who replied: “The Navaho Indians have no choice in the matter; they must come in and go to the Bosque Redondo, or remain in their own country, at war.” [8](#)

Having no choice in the matter, and burdened with women and children

suffering from cold and starvation, Delgadito surrendered. Barboncito, El Sordo, and many of the warriors waited in the mountains to see what would happen to their people.

Those who had surrendered were sent to the Bosque Redondo, but Carleton arranged for the first captives to be given special treatment—the best rations, the best shelters—on the journey and upon arrival at the Bosque. Forbidding as was that barren plain on the Pecos, Delgadito was impressed by the kindness of his captors. When the Star Chief informed him that he could return to Fort Wingate with his family if he would persuade other Navaho leaders that life at the Bosque was better than starvation and freezing, Delgadito agreed to go. At the same time, the general ordered Kit Carson to invade Canyon de Chelly, destroy food and livestock, and kill or capture the Navahos in that last stronghold.

In preparation for the Chelly campaign, Carson assembled a pack herd to carry supplies, but on December 13 Barboncito and his warriors swooped down on the herd and ran the mules off to the canyon, where they could be used as a winter meat supply. Carson sent two detachments of soldiers in pursuit, but the Navahos divided into several small parties and escaped under cover of a heavy snowstorm. Lieutenant Donaciano Montoya's cavalymen stumbled upon a small camp, charged it, drove the Navahos into a cedar brake, and captured thirteen women and children. The lieutenant reported: "Indian was shot through the right side but succeeded in escaping through the tangled underwood. His son, a little boy of ten years old and very intelligent for an Indian, was taken a short time afterwards, and reported that his father died amongst the rocks in a neighboring arroyo."

With no mules for packing supplies, Kit Carson now informed General Carleton that the Canyon de Chelly expedition would have to be delayed. The general promptly replied: "You will not delay the expedition on account of lack of transportation. You will have the men carry their blankets and, if necessary, three or four days' rations in haversacks." ⁹

On January 6, 1864, the soldiers marched out of Fort Canby. Captain Albert

Pfeiffer led a small force, which was to enter the east end of Canyon de Chelly. Kit Carson led a larger force, which was to enter the west end. Six inches of snow lay on the ground, temperature was below freezing, and the marching was slow.

A week later Pfeiffer entered the canyon. From rims and ledges hundreds of half-starved Navahos hurled stones, pieces of wood, and Spanish curses upon the heads of the soldiers. But they could not stop them. Pfeiffer's men destroyed hogans, food caches, and livestock; they killed three Navahos who came within range of their muskets, found two elderly Navahos frozen to death, and captured nineteen women and children.

Carson meanwhile had established a camp at the west end and was scouting the canyon from the rims. On January 12; one of his patrols encountered a band of Navahos, killing eleven of them. Two days later the two commands linked up. The entire canyon had been traversed without a major fight.

That evening three Navahos approached the soldiers' camp under a truce flag. Their people were starving and freezing, they told Carson. They chose to surrender rather than die. "You have until tomorrow morning," Carson replied. "After that time my soldiers will hunt you down." Next morning, sixty ragged and emaciated Navahos arrived at the camp and surrendered.

Before returning to Fort Canby, Carson ordered complete destruction of Navaho properties within the canyon—including their fine peach orchards, more than five thousand trees. The Navahos could forgive the Rope Thrower for fighting them as a soldier, for making prisoners of them, even for destroying their food supplies, but the one act they never forgave him for was cutting down their beloved peach trees.

During the next few weeks as news of the soldiers' entry into Canyon de Chelly spread through the hidden camps of the Navahos, the people lost heart. "We fought for that country because we did not want to lose it," Manuelito said afterward. "We lost nearly everything. ... The American nation is too powerful for us to fight. When we had to fight for a few days we felt fresh, but in a short

time we were worn out and the soldiers starved us out.” [10](#)

On January 31 Delgadito with his reassurances of conditions at Bosque Redondo persuaded 680 more Navahos to surrender at Fort Wingate. Severe winter weather and lack of food forced others to come into Fort Canby. By mid-February 1,200 were there, hungry and destitute. The Army issued them scanty rations, and the very old and the very young began to die. On February 21 Herrero Grande came in with his band, and the numbers rose to 1,500. By early March three thousand had surrendered at both forts, and the trails to the north were filled with fearful Navahos approaching over the frozen snow. But the *rico* chiefs, Manuelito, Barboncito, and Armijo, refused to quit. With their people they stayed in the mountains, still determined not to surrender.

During March the Long Walk of the Navahos to Fort Sumner and the Bosque Redondo was set in motion. The first contingent of 1,430 reached Fort Sumner on March 13; ten died en route; three children were kidnapped, probably by Mexicans among the soldier escort.

Meanwhile a second group of 2,400 had left Fort Canby, their numbers already reduced by 126 who had died at the fort. The long caravan included 30 wagons, 3,000 sheep, and 473 horses. The Navahos had the fortitude to bear freezing weather, hunger, dysentery, jeers of the soldiers, and the hard three-hundred-mile journey, but they could not bear the homesickness, the loss of their land. They wept, and 197 of them died before they reached their cruel destination.

On March 20 eight hundred more Navahos left Fort Canby, most of them women, children, and old men. The Army supplied them only twenty-three wagons. “On the second day’s march,” the officer in command reported, “a very severe snowstorm set in which lasted for four days with unusual severity, and occasioned great suffering amongst the Indians, many of whom were nearly naked and of course unable to withstand such a storm.” When they reached Los Pinos, below Albuquerque, the Army commandeered the wagons for other use, and the Navahos had to camp in the open. By the time the journey could be

resumed, several children had vanished. “At this place,” a lieutenant commented, “officers who have Indians in charge will have to exercise extreme vigilance, or the Indians’ children will be stolen from them and sold.” This contingent reached the Bosque on May 11, 1864. “I left Fort Canby with 800 and received 146 en route to Fort Sumner, making about 946 in all. Of this number about 110 died.”

Late in April one of the holdout chiefs, Armijo, appeared at Fort Canby and informed the post commander (Captain Asa Carey) that Manuelito would arrive in a few days with Navahos who had spent the winter far to the north along the Little Colorado and San Juan. Armijo’s band of more than four hundred came in a few days later, but Manuelito halted his people a few miles away at a place called Quelitas and sent a messenger to inform the soldier chief that he would like to have a talk with him. During the parley which followed, Manuelito said that his people wished to stay near the fort, plant their grain crops, and graze their sheep as they had always done.

“There is but one place for you,” Captain Carey replied, “and that is to go to the Bosque.”

“Why must we go to the Bosque?” Manuelito asked. “We have never stolen or murdered, and have at all times kept the peace we promised General Canby.” He added that his people feared they were being collected at the Bosque so the soldiers could shoot them down as they had at Fort Fauntleroy in 1861. Carey assured him that this was not so, but Manuelito said he would not surrender his people until he had talked with his old friend Herrero Grande or some of the other Navaho leaders who had been at the Bosque.

When General Carleton heard that there was a chance of Manuelito surrendering, he sent four carefully chosen Navahos from the Bosque (but not Herrero Grande) to use their influence on the reluctant war chief. They did not convince Manuelito. One June night after they had talked, Manuelito and his band vanished from Quelitas and went back to their hiding places along the Little Colorado.

In September he heard that his old ally Barboncito had been captured in the Canyon de Chelly. Now he, Manuelito, was the last of the *rico* holdouts, and he knew the soldiers would be looking everywhere for him.

During the autumn, Navahos who had escaped from the Bosque Redondo began returning to their homeland with frightening accounts of what was happening to the people there. It was a wretched land, they said. The soldiers prodded them with bayonets and herded them into adobe-walled compounds where the soldier chiefs were always counting them and putting numbers down in little books. The soldier chiefs promised them clothing and blankets and better food, but their promises were never kept. All the cottonwood and mesquite had been cut down, so that only roots were left for firewood. To shelter themselves from rain and sun they had to dig holes in the sandy ground, and cover and line them with mats of woven grass. They lived like prairie dogs in burrows. With a few tools the soldiers gave them they broke the soil of the Pecos bottomlands and planted grain, but floods and droughts and insects killed the crops, and now everyone was on half-rations. Crowded together as they were, disease had begun to take a toll of the weaker ones. It was a bad place, and although escape was difficult and dangerous under the watchful eyes of the soldiers, many were risking their lives to get away.

Meanwhile, Star Chief Carleton had persuaded the Vicario of Santa Fe to sing a Te Deum in celebration of the Army's successful removal of the Navahos to the Bosque, and the general described the place to his superiors in Washington as "a fine reservation ... there is no reason why they [the Navahos] will not be the most happy and prosperous and well-provided-for Indians in the United States. ... At all events ... we can feed them cheaper than we can fight them."

In the eyes of the Star Chief, his prisoners were only mouths and bodies. "These six thousand mouths must eat, and these six thousand bodies must be clothed. When it is considered what a magnificent pastoral and mineral country they have surrendered to us—a country whose value can hardly be estimated—the mere pittance, in comparison, which must at once be given to support them,

sinks into insignificance as a price for their natural heritage.”

And no advocate of Manifest Destiny ever phrased his support of that philosophy more unctuously than he: “The exodus of this whole people from the land of their fathers is not only an interesting but a touching sight. They have fought us gallantly for years on years; they have defended their mountains and their stupendous canyons with a heroism which any people might be proud to emulate; but when, at length, they found it was their destiny, too, as it had been that of their brethren, tribe after tribe, away back toward the rising of the sun, to give way to the insatiable progress of our race, they threw down their arms, and, as brave men entitled to our admiration and respect, have come to us with confidence in our magnanimity, and feeling that we are too powerful and too just a people to repay that confidence with meanness or neglect—feeling that having sacrificed to us their beautiful country, their homes, the associations of their lives, the scenes rendered classic in their traditions, we will not dole out to them a miser’s pittance in return for what they know to be and what we know to be a princely realm.” [11](#)

Manuelito had not thrown down his arms, however, and he was too important a chief for General Carleton to permit such incorrigibility to continue unchallenged. In February, 1865, Navaho runners from Fort Wingate brought Manuelito a message from the Star Chief, a warning that he and his band would be hunted down to the death unless they came in peaceably before spring. “I am doing no harm to anyone,” Manuelito told the messengers. “I will not leave my country. I intend to die here.” But he finally agreed to talk again with some of the chiefs who were at the Bosque Redondo.

In late February, Herrero Grande and five other Navaho leaders from the Bosque arranged to meet Manuelito near the Zuni trading post. The weather was cold, and the land was covered with deep snow. After embracing his old friends, Manuelito led them back into the hills where his people were hidden. Only about a hundred men, women, and children were left of Manuelito’s band; they had a few horses and a few sheep. “Here is all I have in the world,” Manuelito said.

“See what a trifling amount. You see how poor they are. My children are eating palmilla roots.” After a pause he added that his horses were in no condition for travel to the Bosque. Herrero replied that he had no authority to extend the time set for him to surrender, and he warned Manuelito in a friendly way that he would be risking the lives of his people if he did not come in and surrender. Manuelito wavered. He said he would surrender for the sake of the women and children; then he added that he would need three months to get his livestock in order. Finally he declared flatly that he could not leave his country.

“My God and my mother live in the West, and I will not leave them. It is a tradition of my people that we must never cross the three rivers—the Grande, the San Juan, the Colorado. Nor could I leave the Chuska Mountains. I was born there. I shall remain. I have nothing to lose but my life, and *that* they can come and take whenever they please, but I will not move. I have never done any wrong to the Americans or the Mexicans. I have never robbed. If I am killed, innocent blood will be shed.”

Herrero said to him: “I have done all I could for your benefit; have given you the best advice; I now leave you as if your grave were already made.” [12](#)

In Santa Fe a few days later Herrero Grande informed General Carleton of Manuelito’s defiant stand. Carleton’s response was a harsh order to the commander at Fort Wingate: “I understand if Manuelito ... could be captured his band would doubtless come in; and that if you could make certain arrangements with the Indians at the Zuni village, where he frequently comes on a visit and to trade, they would cooperate with you in his capture. ... Try hard to get Manuelito. Have him securely ironed and carefully guarded. It will be a mercy to others whom he controls to capture or kill him at once. I prefer he should be captured. If he attempts to escape ... he will be shot down.” [13](#)

But Manuelito was too clever to fall into Carleton’s trap at Zuni, and he managed to avoid capture through the spring and summer of 1865. Late in the summer Barboncito and several of his warriors escaped from Bosque Redondo; they were said to be in the Apache country of Sierra del Escadello. So many

Navahos were slipping away from the reservation that Carleton posted permanent guards for forty miles around Fort Sumner. In August the general ordered the post commander to kill every Navaho found off the reservation without a pass.

When the Bosque's grain crops failed again in the autumn of 1865, the Army issued the Navahos meal, flour, and bacon which had been condemned as unfit for soldiers to eat. Deaths began to rise again, and so did the number of attempted escapes.

Although General Carleton was being openly criticized now by New Mexicans for conditions at Bosque Redondo, he continued to hunt down Navahos. At last, on September 1, 1866, the chief he wanted most—Manuelito—limped into Fort Wingate with twenty-three beaten warriors and surrendered. They were all in rags, their bodies emaciated. They still wore leather bands on their wrists for protection from the slaps of bowstrings, but they had no war bows, no arrows. One of Manuelito's arms hung useless at his side from a wound. A short time later Barboncito came in with twenty-one followers and surrendered for the second time. Now there were no more war chiefs.

Ironically, only eighteen days after Manuelito surrendered, General Carleton was removed from command of the Army's Department of New Mexico. The Civil War, which had brought Star Chief Carleton to power, had been over for more than a year, and the New Mexicans had had enough of him and his pompous ways.

When Manuelito arrived at the Bosque a new superintendent was there, A. B. Norton. The superintendent examined the soil on the reservation and pronounced it unfit for cultivation of grain because of the presence of alkali. "The water is black and brackish, scarcely bearable to the taste, and said by the Indians to be unhealthy, because one-fourth of their population have been swept off by disease." The reservation, Norton added, had cost the government millions of dollars. "The sooner it is abandoned and the Indians removed, the better. I have heard it suggested that there was speculation at the bottom of it. ...

Do you expect an Indian to be satisfied and contented deprived of the common comforts of life, without which a white man would not be contented anywhere? Would any sensible man select a spot for a reservation for 8,000 Indians where the water is scarcely bearable, where the soil is poor and cold, and where the muskite [mesquite] roots 12 miles distant are the only wood for the Indians to use? ... If they remain on this reservation they must always be held there by force, and not from choice. O! let them go back, or take them to where they can have good cool water to drink, wood plenty to keep them from freezing to death, and where the soil will produce something for them to eat. ...” [14](#)

For two years a steady stream of investigators and officials from Washington paraded through the reservation. Some were genuinely compassionate; some were mainly concerned with reducing expenditures.

“We were there for a few years,” Manuelito remembered. “Many of our people died from the climate. ... People from Washington held a council with us. He explained how the whites punished those who disobeyed the law. We promised to obey the laws if we were permitted to get back to our own country. We promised to keep the treaty. ... We promised four times to do so. We all said ‘yes’ to the treaty, and he gave us good advice. He was General Sherman.”

When the Navaho leaders first saw the Great Warrior Sherman they were fearful of him because his face was the same as Star Chief Carleton’s—fierce and hairy with a cruel mouth—but his eyes were different, the eyes of a man who had suffered and knew the pain of it in others.

“We told him we would try to remember what he said,” Manuelito recalled. “He said: ‘I want all you people to look at me.’ He stood up for us to see him. He said if we would do right we could look people in the face. Then he said: ‘My children, I will send you back to your homes.’”

Before they could leave, the chiefs had to sign the new treaty (June 1, 1868), which began: “From this day forward all war between the parties to this agreement shall forever cease.” Barboncito signed first, then Armijo, Delgadito, Manuelito, Herrero Grande, and seven others.

“The nights and days were long before it came time for us to go to our homes,” Manuelito said. “The day before we were to start we went a little way towards home, because we were so anxious to start. We came back and the Americans gave us a little stock and we thanked them for that. We told the drivers to whip the mules, we were in such a hurry. When we saw the top of the mountain from Albuquerque we wondered if it was our mountain, and we felt like talking to the ground, we loved it so, and some of the old men and women cried with joy when they reached their homes.” [15](#)



3. A Navaho warrior of the 1860's. Photographed by John Gaw Meem and reproduced by permission of the Denver Art Museum.

And so the Navahos came home. When the new reservation lines were surveyed, much of their best pastureland was taken away for the white settlers.

Life would not be easy. They would have to struggle to endure. Bad as it was, the Navahos would come to know that they were the least unfortunate of all the western Indians. For the others, the ordeal had hardly begun.

IN A SACRED MANNER I LIVE

Wa - kaq - kaq yaq wa - oq ne wa - kaq - kaq yaq wa -
oq ne ma - lpi - ya ta wa - li - ta ye wa - kaq -
kaq yaq wa - oq ne mi - ta - kaq - ke o - ta ye - lo ke

Courtesy of the Bureau of American Ethnology Collection

In a sacred manner
I live.
To the heavens
I gazed.
In a sacred manner I live.
My horses
Are many.