

Montana Hills

General George Armstrong Custer had his last stand on June 25, 1876, but that is only the beginning of the story. Custer and the Seventh Cavalry's legend became immortal after their final battle at the Little Bighorn, but the other side – the winning side – faced decades of neglect before its chance at recognition could come. At the top of Last Stand Hill, visitors to the Little Bighorn Battlefield can walk in one of two directions. The grand monument to Custer and the Cavalry stands at the right; old Custer legends haunt the granite obelisk, and the names etched in the stone hint at a mystery of death and intrigue. To the left, a small hill surrounded by sandstone invites visitors to explore a once-victorious culture, long forgotten by history and those who repeat it. The American Indian Memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument was dedicated on June 25, 2003; 127 years after their greatest victory, the American Indians received their recognition.

The Indian Memorial looks like one more Montana hill from a distance, but on closer inspection, this hill becomes something unique. A small path leads visitors into a sunken mound in the earth; from the center looking up, all there is to see is sky. On the walls inside of the circle are interpretive panels, one for each of the battle participating tribes; words, sketches, stories, and names decorate them. An opening in the sandstone wall on the south end of the memorial offers visitors a direct view of the Cavalry monument; it is framed in the Indian Memorial's walls, and reminds visitors to remember the memorial's theme, "Peace Through Unity." During the summer, water trickles down both sides to represent tears for the battle's fallen, hence its name: the Weeping Wall.

The most imposing part of the Indian Memorial – the part that is visible from the road up to the battlefield entrance – is the Spirit Warriors sculpture. The massive wrought iron figures stand at the north end of the memorial. The sculpture depicts three American Indian warriors riding their horses east, with their weapons drawn and ready. A woman reaches out to the last warrior with a shield, and he leans down to take it from her hands. The Spirit Warriors provide a spot for American Indians to leave offerings and mementos to their families and ancestors; scarves, tobacco, sweet grass, and beaded necklaces flutter in the breeze.

Memorials are an important part of America's cultural landscape, and their meanings change over time, regardless of what is being memorialized. Some conflicts in America that have since been memorialized continue to affect America's attitudes. For example, the Civil War and its legacy still affect some individuals because the Civil War caused such a deep rift in the country.¹ This rift came between the North and the South, and much of the conflict was over a matter of race; not only is the Civil War often memorialized, but its memorialization can cause introspection among Americans concerning how the country treats other races.

In America, post-Civil War memorials are often dedicated to fallen American soldiers and their sacrifices.² The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C., is a good example; the everlasting flame burns there for all anonymous and unknown soldiers, just as white marble markers stand on the Little Bighorn Battlefield for all of the

¹ Piehler, Kurt, Remembering War the American Way, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1995, 5.

² Ibid, 6

unnamed Cavalry soldiers. In exchange for their sacrifices, American memorials offer physical spots for these soldiers to be honored.

Memorial designs have changed throughout the years. After the Civil War, permanent statues were the most popular designs, but “in the twentieth century, many have argued that a whole range of utilitarian structures and objects – from auditoriums to trees – should serve as war memorials.”³ Memorials are often reflections of the feelings and attitudes of the country at the time. Memorials might also be more interactive; instead of an imposing statue, for example, a memorial might become a part of the landscape, or even interactive, like the Vietnam Veterans memorial, which is meant to be touched and physically experienced. Mount Rushmore is a combination of both. The mountain is natural, but man-made as well. Visitors cannot escape its image because it is so imposing. This monument represents the power of America; both through the faces of its American heroes, and through the ability necessary to even carve the faces in the first place. The mountain is cultural; it represents America’s past, as well as the natural landscape that makes up the country.⁴

Aside from being tall and imposing or interactive and “natural,” some memorials are created for the landscape to swallow. For example, in Kassel, Germany, the Aschrott Fountain – built by a Jewish man and later destroyed by the Nazis – was later rebuilt, but the new sculpture was created to sink into the ground, and eventually become flush with its surface. This memorial’s purpose was to remind viewers of what had once been on that spot; it was meant to call attention to the fountain’s absence.⁵ In this way, memorials

³ Ibid, 7

⁴ Boag, Peter, “Thinking Like Mount Rushmore: Sexuality and Gender in the Republican Landscape.” Seeing Nature Through Gender. Ed. Virginia J. Scharff. University Press of Kansas, 2003.

⁵ Young, James E., The Texture of Memory, Yale University Press, 1993, 45.

can be used to remind viewers of what has been lost, whether that be lives, lands, homes, or innocence.

Memorials are also created to offer a place to mourn; the memorial holds onto painful memories and thoughts so that individuals do not need to. Instead of waking one morning and weeping for relatives lost during World War I, for example, one can visit a memorial to the war dead and take that moment to remember them. With a memorial available for the act of mourning, one does not need to carry the burden everyday.⁶

Finally, memorials offer a place to learn about, and experience, the past. Whether that past is painful, beautiful, or both, a memorial can hold onto those lessons and memories; essentially, memorials do the work. They are built to memorialize an event, a person, or a group of people, and to present a physical location for visitors to observe, mourn, remember, or learn.

Historian Peter Boag argues that memorial's meanings can change over time; sometimes, a monument can even have underlying meanings that were not necessarily apparent when the memorial was built.⁷ In South Dakota, Mount Rushmore calls attention to America's founding fathers – those who helped to bring the country to the level of progress that it enjoys today – and the deep sense of patriotism and pride that this mountain is assumed to give to visitors. Mount Rushmore was not originally carved to provide America with a “Shrine of Democracy”, however; its original purpose was to draw tourism to South Dakota, therefore helping the state out of the economic slump it was in during the 1920s.⁸ Not until the mountain was finished did its new meaning become obvious; no longer was Mount Rushmore just a tourist attraction; now, it had a

⁶ Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning

⁷ Boag, “Thinking Like Mount Rushmore”

⁸ Ibid

deeper meaning assigned. Mount Rushmore became cultural, political, and patriotic to Americans only after the last face was carved. Memorials' meanings are not always set in stone, even if they seem to be; according to Boag, those meanings can change and evolve, depending on the circumstances.

Jay Winter suggests that memorials' meanings can be distorted through modern lenses. World War I memorials are often interpreted as representing modernism's most popular time in Europe. These interpretations suggest that when soldiers had returned from the fighting, they supposedly brought with them concrete images of the Great War, and these images were reflected in memorials. Winter suggests that this modern interpretation of the past is inaccurate. Instead, Winter argues, World War I memorials represent something different than modernism's peak; the memorials acted only as a way for Europeans to express their sadness and personal understandings of the war.⁹ Today, some historians delve too deeply into what war memorials represented at the time they were built. Instead, they should focus on why those memorials were built in the first place. The purpose of a memorial – and not the content or deeper meaning – is the aspect that historians ought to study, according to Winter.¹⁰

G. Kurt Piehler takes memorials' purposes and expands them further. One memorial can suggest many different things, depending upon who is experiencing that memorial.¹¹ To some Americans, the Vietnam Veterans memorial is a place to honor the war's dead and to acknowledge their loyalty to the country, as well as the struggle to bring freedom to Indochina. To other Americans, the memorial is a place to mourn the mistakes that America made by entering what they saw as an unjust war that killed so

⁹ Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Piehler, Remembering War the American Way

many U.S. soldiers and Vietnamese innocents.¹² Though a memorial's design is permanent, its purpose is no more constant than its meaning. That purpose depends on who experiences a memorial; though a memorial might serve one purpose for one visitor, it could very well serve a completely different purpose for another.

Boag argues that a memorial's meaning can change over time. Winter suggests that modern ideas need not be subscribed to past memorials; their purposes are the most important aspect. Piehler argues that a memorial can serve very different purposes, depending on who is doing the viewing. Some of these aspects also apply to the Indian Memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield. The memorial was built to give fair representation to the American Indians at the battlefield, but it has evolved into something more. Now, its meaning is "Peace Through Unity"; it is meant to bring all visitors to the battlefield together to appreciate and learn about the past. The Indian Memorial also serves different purposes depending on who visits. American Indians use the memorial to acknowledge their ancestors and to honor their memories. Other visitors use the memorial to learn more about the Custer fight, as well as the American Indians' past and their role in America's history.

The Indian Memorial was possible only after a long, hard fight. After the original battle, Custer and his men became heroes in America's eyes, and the Indian warriors became hostile savages. The 36,000-pound granite obelisk on Last Stand Hill was mounted to honor Custer, as were the white marble markers that showed where each Cavalry soldier fell during the battle. This was Custer's place. The markers stood alone; American Indian casualties were not acknowledged in the same way. For decades, Custer's Seventh Cavalry monument was the sole memorial; no monument stood to call

¹² Ibid

attention to the other side of the battle. The Sioux, Cheyenne, Arikira, Crow, and other descendents of the battle had no place of their own to go to pray, give offerings, or honor their ancestors. The battlefield on which Custer met his death at the hands of Indian warriors belonged to the white Americans.

Three main factors contributed to make the Indian memorial possible: visibility, protest, and vigilance. American Indians engaged in all of these, as did many white Americans with the same hopes. The cause needed to become well known, and it had to be popular with the National Park Service (NPS) and governmental higher-ups; this was not something that the American Indians could do completely on their own.

American Indians were becoming more visible in the late-twentieth century, thanks largely to the various media outlets dedicated to their history. These media opened the rest of America's eyes to the American Indian situation, and made the Indian memorial movement possible, because the rest of America started to care about American Indians' treatment by the white Americans.

This new visibility paved the way for the red power movement and the American Indian Movement (AIM). AIM took advantage of its new media coverage and used the opportunities to advertise its message asking for an Indian memorial through protests at the battlefield. The protest that garnered the most attention, as well as the best results, was in 1988 and led by AIM activist Russell Means. AIM was public – though quite volatile – about its desires, and eventually, its protests became sufficient enough to make the NPS think seriously about how to please the American Indians and get a memorial in place.

After the initial process of gaining support and attention through protest, American Indians and white Americans began the long, hard court process and funding fights to get the memorial built. Vigilance carried the cause through to the end in 2003. The process would not have been possible without the extreme dedication from a few organizations and individuals.

These three factors all contributed to getting an Indian memorial built at the battlefield, but the fight was long and hard, and it met with its fair share of controversy, dissent, and displeasure. What exactly made the memorial possible? This is the Indian Memorial's story.

Bring Packs

In order to understand the Indian Memorial's history, knowledge of Custer's fight is necessary. The battle was not only Custer's Last Stand; it was also a last stand for the American Indians. Though the American Indians won the battle, they lost the war for their lands soon after. The battlefield is a site that represents expansion, and the one last gasp of resistance before that expansion took hold completely.

In the afternoon of June 25, 1876, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his five companies left Major Reno and Captain Frederick Benteen at Reno Creek, and set off with 210 men to meet the "hostile" Sioux and Cheyenne.¹ Custer estimated that there were approximately 1,500 warriors waiting, and he assumed that his force could handle the number.² He assumed wrong. The next time Reno or Benteen saw Custer, he and his men were splayed across a bloody battlefield, naked and mutilated.³

The mystery of the battle is a huge draw for Little Bighorn Battlefield visitors. White American participant accounts, such as those from Reno's side, as well as battlefield archaeology, have been used to explain how Custer got into his last battle. No solid answers exist to the question: what exactly happened to Custer and his men, and how did it occur? There are surviving warrior accounts, but as historian Jerome Greene puts it, they do not always match up with each other. Problems in translation, the effects of sensational news stories, and fear that kept many American Indians from telling their

¹ Utley, Robert, Custer Battlefield National Monument. Washington, D.C.: Office of Publications, 1969, 28.

² Ibid, 25

³ Ibid, 37

stories prevent historians from fully knowing what happened in June 1876.⁴ This mystery certainly does not stop them from trying to understand.

Custer was more afraid of the Sioux escaping the Cavalry's grasp than of the number of their warriors. He had been sent out to gather up the Sioux who followed Sitting Bull's example in his refusal to move to an Indian reservation.⁵ Though Custer's Crow and Arikira scouts found evidence of a large Indian village – much larger than Custer's command could handle – Custer pushed on.⁶

The mistake that “battle buffs” still fault Custer for is his decision to split his entire command into three battalions. Reno and Benteen each took three companies, and Custer took his doomed five. All three leaders set off in different directions.⁷ Reno and Benteen fought their own battles with the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, and were stuck on a hilltop until the 26th.

Doug Scott et al has tried to explain some of the moves that Custer would have made before the battle, in an attempt to offer an overview of Custer's movements after the battalion split. Custer allowed the actions to begin early in the day when he disregarded his scout Mitch Boyer's warning that “...the Indian village was the largest he had ever seen. According to him, to pitch into it invited certain death.”⁸ Custer intended to surprise the “hostiles,” and so veered away from Reno's companies and rode out of the valley in which Reno later led his retreat.⁹

⁴ Personal interview with Jerome Greene, January 13, 2005

⁵ Utley, Custer Battlefield National Monument, 12

⁶ Ibid, 25

⁷ Ibid, 28

⁸ Scott, Doug, Richard A. Fox Jr., Melissa A. Connor, and Dick Harmon. et al, Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1989, 16.

⁹ Ibid

Fortune frowned on Custer with the heavy timber and the tall ridges and hills that decorated the landscape and blocked the Cavalry's view of the massive village that the men were rapidly approaching. Custer rode along a ridge overlooking the soon-to-be battlefield, and approached Medicine Tail Coulee. From here on, Custer's moves are unknown and explanations are based largely on historical speculation, with some archaeological evidence to back them up.¹⁰

According to Scott, Custer likely saw a portion of the Indian village from a high point on the battlefield, right before he entered Medicine Tail Coulee. At that point, it was too late to avert a confrontation, even if he had wanted to. Lieutenant Cooke, who rode with Custer, sent the last message that he or any of Custer's men would ever send again: "Benteen, Come on. Big Village, be quick, bring packs. P.S. bring pacs [sic]. W.W. Cooke."¹¹ The message carrier – Trumpeter John Martin – was the last white man to see any of Custer's battalion alive.¹²

Custer's body was found at a high point on the battlefield, now named Last Stand Hill. Marble markers surround this area in a very high concentration, and it is at this point on which the Cavalry monument rests. Over the bluffs to the north and northwest of Last Stand Hill are scattered markers representing the remains of Captain Keogh and his men, along with the men in reserves with their horses in Horseholder's Ravine. To the South of Last Stand Hill are markers spread along a possible skirmish line leading down to Deep Ravine, where approximately twenty-eight soldiers are believed to still lay buried by both erosion and time.¹³ On another large hill, east of Custer's marker, is the

¹⁰ Ibid, 17

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid, 33

final fighting place of Lieutenant Calhoun, whose Company L died, along with a large portion of Company C. The battlefield's geography allows visitors to take in most of these sites from the top of Last Stand Hill, which presents a view of the battle from Custer's own perspective.

The "facts" of Custer's battle cannot be completely proven; most battle buffs have their own versions of how, where, and why Custer fought and died. One fact remains undisputed, however: Custer and his 210 men died in those rolling Montana hills that now make up the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, and the mystery of their final hours has captivated audiences ever since.

After the actual battle, the myth of Custer the hero and the battlefield at which he died grew into a staple of American history. The news broke quickly. The July 6, 1876 issue of the *Bismarck Tribune* reported Custer's story for the first time:

Massacred, General Custer and 261 Men the Victims. No Officer or Man of 5 Companies Left to Tell the Tale. 3 Days Desperate Fighting by Maj. Reno and the Remainder of the Seventh. [...] Squaws Mutilate and Rob the Dead. Victims Captured Alive Tortured in a Most Fiendish Manner. What Will Congress Do About It? Shall This Be the Beginning of the End?¹⁴

Arrangements for a Cavalry memorial began almost at once. The Secretary of War ordered the Custer National Cemetery for establishment on January 29, 1879.¹⁵ In 1881, the granite obelisk – which honors the fallen soldiers – was placed over a mass

¹⁴ "Massacred", Newspaper Clipping File, White Swan Memorial Library, hereafter cited as NCF, WSM

¹⁵ Rickey, Don Jr. History of Custer Battlefield. Fort Collins: Old Army Press, 1998, 29.

grave on Last Stand Hill.¹⁶ At first, the War Department had the responsibility of monitoring and caring for the battlefield. In 1940, Edward Luce became the first battlefield superintendent when the site was transferred to the Department of the Interior.¹⁷

Before and after this transfer to the Department of the Interior, visitors and administrators celebrated the battle's anniversary with festivities and commemorations. The semi-centennial in 1926 was a particularly notable celebration. American Indians and American soldiers who had participated in the battle met at the memorial for the three-day long commemoration.¹⁸ Don Rickey writes,

The two parties met in the vicinity of the Custer Memorial. On behalf of the Army, General Godfrey presented White Bull with an American flag, and White Bull reciprocated by handing the General a much-prized Indian blanket. The two aged men then shook hands in token of the peace that had long since ended the Indian Wars in the West.¹⁹

In the decades since the battle, one theme has been "Peace Through Unity" when dealing with the rift between American Indians and white Americans. In many of these calls for peace, American Indians have attempted to show their own American patriotism and to stress their desire for inclusion into American society. Even American Indians who had fought Custer at the battle of the Little Bighorn called the white Americans their brothers in the years that followed. On June 25, 1916, Chief Two Moon stood on Last Stand Hill and spoke: "Forty years ago, I fought Custer, all day, until all were dead. I

¹⁶ Ibid, 60-61

¹⁷ Ibid, 34

¹⁸ Ibid, 80

¹⁹ Ibid, 82

was then the enemy of the white man, now I am the friend and brother, living under the flag of our country.”²⁰ American Indians made concessions to the white Americans. They helped the American military by serving as scouts on campaigns against other Native tribes. They also moved off of their lands onto reservations to keep peace between themselves and the white Americans.

The American Indians were not always rewarded for their efforts; often, they became invisible Americans; at times, they were sequestered on their small reservations and cut off from the rest of the country.²¹ Many Americans outside of the West are not even aware that American Indians still live in places like South Dakota, Montana, and Colorado. When Americans hear about “Custer’s Last Stand,” the image that likely comes to their minds is one of Custer in his buckskin jacket, fighting off the Indians. Can they name the tribes of American Indians who fought Custer?

American Indians are not only invisible in society because some citizens do not realize they exist. American history traditionally neglected the American Indians, though this has changed in recent times. History textbooks from the past often unfairly portrayed American Indians. Author Frances FitzGerald critiques past textbooks, and how these textbooks represented American Indians, if they represented them at all. “For nearly half the [twentieth] century,” FitzGerald writes, “a high percentage – perhaps even a majority – of American schoolchildren learned American history from a single book: David Saville Muzzey’s *American History*.”²² Muzzey did not write favorably about the American Indians. According to FitzGerald, Muzzey wrote, “the North American

²⁰ Personal interview with John Doerner, February 3, 2005

²¹ Personal interview with Paul Hutton, March 9, 2005

²² FitzGerald, Frances. *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980, 58.

Indians ‘had some noble qualities...but at bottom they were a treacherous, cruel people.’”²³

Well-documented history books begin mostly with Muzzey, but FitzGerald addresses American Indians’ status and place in history as well. Manifest destiny took its toll on any minority’s place in the study, and this likely affected how everyday citizens treated American Indians. FitzGerald writes, “Most of the early writers of American-history textbooks were preachers or teachers in church schools, and for them American civilization was, essentially, not something new but an arm of Christian civilization extending into the new continent”.²⁴ This conservative viewpoint carried over far into the twentieth century.

Manifest Destiny was not always the focus of American history, however. This change took place over time, and did not become noticeable until the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Even though one might expect the most hostile literature on American Indians to be from the 1830s and 1840s, American Indian representation was surprisingly inclusive at this time. “In the texts of the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-forties,” FitzGerald writes, “the North American Indians are presented as interesting, important people – in spite of the fact they are not Christians.”²⁵ Texts explored American Indian cultural practices and customs, and surprisingly, some writings of the time even criticize white American treatment of American Indians.²⁶

This gracious light did not last for very long. Appreciation for the American Indians began a steady decline in the 1840s and continued on until much more recent

²³ Ibid, 64-65

²⁴ Ibid, 75

²⁵ Ibid, 90

²⁶ Ibid, 91

years. After the Civil War, the language used to describe America's native people turned hostile. "Ignorant now of ethnography," FitzGerald writes, "they referred to the Indian nations as 'savage,' 'barbarous,' and 'half-civilized,' and left it at that".²⁷

By the 1890s – the decades following the end of the Indian Wars – white American portrayals of American Indians declined even more. Words added to the repertoire of American Indian descriptions included: "treacherous, cruel, tyrannical to women, idolatrous, lazy, vengeful, and given to torture."²⁸

By the twentieth century, not only were some history textbooks portraying Indians as cruel and treacherous, some were not including American Indians at all. FitzGerald writes, "As such, they were an object of national pride: they may have been savages, but they were our savages. Then, as the century wore on and the Indians were forced to move West, they became more and more marginal to the concerns of the nation. The text writers naturally grew indifferent to them."²⁹ This indifference only continued. FitzGerald writes, "In the nineteen-thirties, the only texts that even mentioned the Indians were those for lower grades, whose authors clearly intended to interest children with tales of a colorful, exotic people who behaved, as one book put it bluntly, just like children."³⁰

Finally, in the mid-1960s, American Indians started showing up again in history textbooks; there was less of a focus on culture, however, and more of a focus on the way white Americans treated American Indians in the nineteenth century.³¹ By the 1960s, Americans were being forced to notice the other cultures mixed in with their own;

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid, 92

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid, 93

gradually, American Indians became a noticeable part of the cultural landscape where they had not been seen for a long time.

In the 1986 textbook review book, Looking at History, by O.L. Davis and others, one criterion for judging the value of middle and high school textbooks is how much the texts focus on minorities. The groups given the most attention in the reviews, however, are women and African-Americans.³² Though much of the controversy surrounding American Indians was still alive – as it is today – in 1986, the reviews do not address the plight of the American Indians, nor how the textbooks of the day address the same issues.

George Armstrong Custer is a name made famous by a heroic legend: that of a man dying on the field of battle, close to his loyal soldiers. Custer's name is, at the very least, recognizable by most students. This is not a guess; Hollywood movies alone, such as "They Died With Their Boots On", and "Little Big Man", have contributed to the Custer legend, for good or ill. What would be interesting to learn is how many students could name the most famous American Indians who fought against Custer. Can history students, even today, rattle off facts about Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, or Lame White Man? History students have learned fractured versions of the life stories of Pocahontas, Sacagawea, and Squanto, but few more.

The Little Bighorn Battlefield did not have a memorial for American Indians until 2003. Part of this long-term neglect might have stemmed from the utter lack of American Indian representation in American history for so many years. When some white Americans balked at the idea of an Indian memorial at the Little Bighorn, perhaps their

³² Davis, O.L., Gerald Ponder, Lynn Burlbaw, Maria Garza-Lubeck, and Alfred Moss. Looking at History: A Review of Major U.S. History Textbooks. Washington, D.C.: People for the American Way, 1986.

complaints stemmed from an education that focused so strongly on the white perspective that it managed to forget all about the other side.

Media Influence

The American Indians remained invisible to the majority of Americans until several media outlets opened the country's eyes. The American Indians had been neglected throughout the study of American history in most cases, but this was about to change. Two new books on American Indian history became mainstream in the 1960s and 1970s. For the audience not affected by the books, Hollywood movies influenced the way that many Americans thought about the American Indians and Custer.

After Custer's battle, and up through the 1960s, America idolized the military and its heroes; it was commonplace for Americans to care about their own soldiers' plights and not to concern themselves with the enemy's. Starting in the 1960s however, the American Indians were getting more publicity among white Americans. This publicity led to a greater awareness of American Indians and the troubles they faced in the modern world. The American Indians were able to use this newfound attention to their advantage; when average white Americans heard, read, or viewed American Indian history, they became more sympathetic to American Indians' needs and desires. These new attitudes stemmed from various media that focused on the American Indians, their histories, and their present troubles.

The first half of the twentieth century belonged to Custer; history buffs wanted to know all they could about him as a soldier and as a man. In 1942, "They Died With Their Boots On," a Hollywood movie starring Errol Flynn, hooked a generation onto the Custer mystery and the Little Bighorn battle myth. Flynn played the heroic and brave General Custer, who served his country and followed his orders. He died a glorious death in battle against the Indians who stood in the way of American progress. This

glorious Custer image persisted until the 1960s. When “They Died With Their Boots On” was released, America was wrapped up in World War II, and Americans wanted military heroes to idolize. Custer fit the bill. At the time, Custer was a reflection of the American desires for patriotism, militarism, and the noble cause.

Custer continued to reflect the times in which he was portrayed, as the movie “Little Big Man” shows. “Little Big Man” was released in 1970, during the Vietnam War, when many Americans were unhappy with their country’s role overseas. Dustin Hoffman played Jack Crabb, the last survivor of the battle of the Little Bighorn, and Richard Mulligan played General George Armstrong Custer.¹ Mulligan was no heroic Custer to be admired, however. He played a raving lunatic, wrapped up in nothing save for his own ego, and he suffered a shameful defeat against the Sioux and Cheyenne.

“Little Big Man” portrayed America’s attitudes toward the military heroes that had once held precedence in the media. This film turned the tables toward the American Indians – the “Human Beings” in the movie – and gave their story some play in Hollywood. America was wrapped up in a war that many Americans did not support, and “Little Big Man” enabled them to take out their frustration on a famous military persona. Mulligan played Custer in “Little Big Man” as a reflection of the times and the situations that America was a part of in 1970.²

Film was not the only genre to portray American Indians and Custer in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Two books in particular changed the average white American’s view of the American Indians with a brutal description of American Indian history and the pain their people suffered at white America’s hands. Vine Deloria’s

¹ Internet Movie Database: imdb.com

² Personal correspondence from Robert Reece, March 12, 2005

Custer Died for Your Sins was published in 1969. Deloria's book challenged myths that prevailed about the American Indians and separated them from the stereotypes that existed at the time. Deloria addresses the problems of American Indian "invisibility":

Indians are probably invisible because of the tremendous amount of misinformation about them. Most books about Indians cover some abstract and esoteric topic of the last century. Contemporary books are predominantly by whites trying to solve the "Indian problem." Between the two extremes lives a dynamic people in a social structure of their own, asking only to be freed from their cultural oppression. The future does not look bright for the attainment of such freedom because the white does not understand the Indian and the Indian does not wish to understand the white.³

Deloria's book was popular with all types of readers, American Indian and white American alike. The book was a call to action for American Indians and the white Americans who wished to help them. His writing fueled the American Indian activist groups and their causes at the time.⁴

In 1970, Dee Brown's Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee was an overnight sensation. Brown's book was "a narrative of the conquest of the American West as the victims experienced it, using their own words whenever possible."⁵ Brown's book was a new American Indian history; his stories gave details on the struggles of many tribes. Brown's writing was emotional, and it had wide appeal among white Americans, as well as American Indians.

³ Deloria, Vine Jr. Custer Died for Your Sins. New York: Macmillan, 1969, 12-13.

⁴ Personal interview with Jerome Greene, January 13, 2005

⁵ Brown, Dee. Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee. New York: Holt, Rineheart, and Winston, 1970 xvi.

When Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee came out, its popularity meant that people who had known almost nothing about American Indian history, now had a complete overview of Indian life. As renowned historian Paul Hutton said, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee was the “single most influential book about Western history.”⁶ The book’s influence was so drastic that it seemed as if one day, white Americans knew nothing about the American Indians, and the next day, they knew everything.⁷

Brown’s and Deloria’s books fueled the red power movement, which was the American Indian Movement’s driving force. Robert Utley pointed out that Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee and Custer Died For Your Sins were probably the two biggest “propellants that launched red power.”⁸ The red power movement was not the only movement active at the time – feminist and antiwar movements were also going strong – and red power fed off of these and became its own force. Protest – both violent and peaceful – was a natural part of these movements, and red power protest, along with the awareness that Brown and Deloria provided, “made the general population receptive to the cry that the Indians got a raw deal.”⁹

The media that exposed the American Indian history and present situation paved the way for an Indian memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield by opening up America’s eyes. Americans went from knowing nothing about what American Indians suffered in the past, to understanding at least a part of that suffering through Brown’s and Deloria’s books. With this background in American Indian history, the general population was somewhat prepared to receive the AIM protests calling for an Indian Memorial. This

⁶ Personal interview with Paul Hutton, March 9, 2005

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Personal correspondence from Robert Utley, January 4, 2005

⁹ Ibid

new exposure made for a wider audience and a greater network of support for the American Indians.

America's situation during this time also made for a more receptive look at American Indians. The 1960s were a time for introspection, as well as a time for welcoming all cultures. Americans were beginning to realize that the country was not just white; it was also a place for blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and American Indians. This introspection and realization led to a "maturation" of American society.¹⁰ Americans were beginning to accept other cultures, and finally starting to notice the injustices that these other cultures faced.

¹⁰ Personal interview with Jerome Greene, January 13, 2005

America's Bicentennial

After a few mainstream books and movies about American Indians educated the country about American Indian history, the American Indians themselves began the process of protest at the Custer Battlefield in order to publicize the need for an Indian memorial. Their protest at the battlefield in 1976 drew plenty of attention – though negative – from the country because of its bicentennial year, and because of the way in which the American Indian Movement performed the protest.

The 1970s were a time of unrest and protest in America, and the Custer Battlefield had its fair share of drama. America was in the depths of the Vietnam War, and many large-scale movements, such as the Black Panthers, feminist, anti-war, and red power movements, were becoming outspoken and well known. America's bicentennial year and the battle's centennial both fell in 1976, which made for an environment ripe for protest and attention. AIM took this opportunity to gain some publicity. Russell Means was an active member of AIM; he had led a minor protest to the Custer Battlefield in 1972, demanding an Indian memorial, but had been largely ignored.¹ Means was upset that the battlefield mainly offered Custer's side of the story to battlefield visitors, but neglected the American Indian side. After 1972, Means planned a much larger protest and gathered a hefty group of followers to march to the battlefield and demand an Indian memorial during the annual commemorations.

On June 24, 1976, Means led AIM to the battlefield. Ceremonies had been planned for that day, with renowned historian Robert Utley as the keynote speaker. Though the anniversary was on June 25th, the NPS moved the ceremonies up one day, fearing possible violence from AIM. In the 1970s, AIM was well known for dramatic,

¹ Means, Russell. Where White Men Fear to Tread. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995, 358.

and sometimes violent, tactics to draw attention to its causes. In 1973, for example, AIM took over the Wounded Knee massacre site on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and held a weeks-long standoff against the FBI. Two agents were shot.² Means declared that AIM would be at the Custer battle's centennial celebration, and he also "vowed to set fire to the museum displaying Custer's uniforms..."³ With the atmosphere in the 1970s so volatile, the NPS found it wise to keep the centennial celebrations low-key and to move them to a less obvious day, probably with, according to Utley, "some misguided hope of throwing Russell Means off stride."⁴

Means had his own informative network, however, and he was prepared to shift AIM's plans in order to catch the battlefield during its commemoration. Employees from the battlefield, who were of Crow descent, visited Means during a Cheyenne ceremony a few days before the anniversary, and informed him of the NPS ceremony's change.⁵ Means and AIM simply moved their planned protest up one day. AIM arrived at the battlefield on June 24th with an American flag held upside-down in the international symbol of distress.⁶ Means took the podium and demanded that the American Indians be acknowledged. Means wrote that there were "cops waiting – tribal and BIA police, county sheriffs, highway patrolmen, Park Service rangers, the FBI, and three other kinds of law enforcers."⁷

Utley's version is similar:

² Utley, Robert. Custer and Me. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2004 149.

³ Ibid, 151

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Means, Where White Men Fear to Tread, 357

⁶ Personal interview with John Doerner, February 3, 2005

⁷ Ibid

The day was cold and cloudy, with occasional falls of light rain...As I rode up the hill with the public information officer from the regional office, she told me that security would be heavy but inconspicuous. “Low profile,” she muttered as we drove through the gate and took in the array of ranger cars with light bars on the roof, a heavily armed SWAT team of rangers assembled from parks throughout the region, a contingent of the Montana Highway Patrol, and even some U.S. Park Policemen from Washington with attack dogs on leashes. Only the FBI agents remained “low profile.”⁸

Despite moving the commemoration to a less obvious date, the NPS was still well prepared for potential violence from Means and his group.

Nonetheless, Means arrived before Utley’s keynote speech could begin, took the podium and said, “You continue to invade our territory and to disrupt our families. Still we come with the sacred pipe, still we come in peace, as we always have. If you don’t want peace, if you want to fight, we’re here to fight, too.”⁹ Shortly thereafter, Means demanded a meeting with the NPS, and then at the ranger station, with the media in full force, the superintendent reportedly promised a monument to honor the battle’s Indian dead.¹⁰

Utley had a different opinion of why Means was protesting, and that opinion contributes to the theory that, perhaps, the 1976 protest caused more harm than good for the Indian memorial’s cause. Means was upset over the Cavalry’s invasion of Indian land back in 1876, but the Sioux themselves had encroached onto Crow land in that same year.

⁸ Utley, *Custer and Me*, 151-152

⁹ Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 358

¹⁰ *Ibid*

The Sioux were trespassers as well.¹¹ Means did not mention this in his speech; he simply demanded a memorial for the Sioux and Cheyenne while still neglecting the full story. Though Means's group had a legitimate complaint, it was at the expense of yet more truth.

Utley had his moment to speak after Means vacated the podium, and he made the most of his rebuttal. Utley's speech was a message asking for the battlefield's history to no longer be perverted for personal ends, on both the white American and the American Indian sides. "...[W]e should dedicate ourselves...to righting the wrongs of the past," Utley said, "But in reaching for that goal, let us not infuse the battlefield with a modern meaning untrue to the past."¹² Utley's words rang true; for years, the white Americans had corrupted the battlefield's meaning for their own purposes. Media representations, as well as interpretation at the site had, in the previous years, focused most strongly on the white American side of the battle. American Indians had not always been included in the story, and when they were, it was mostly to comment on their "savagery" and "hostility." Though the white American side was perfectly capable of corrupting the battle's story, it did not mean that the American Indian side was not capable as well. Some American Indians changed the tone of history when given the chance. Means was not suggesting balance or unity on June 24, 1976, instead, he suggested changes that would swing the battlefield's tone completely – and inaccurately – to the opposite side. Means omitted facts and the aspects of his story that did not fit with his own view. By ignoring that the Sioux had invaded, as did the U.S. Cavalry, he skimmed over the entire story. Means

¹¹ Utley, Custer and Me 152-153

¹² Ibid, 153

made the Sioux out to be complete victims, even though other American Indians might see them as victimizers, too.

Though Means claimed that Dick Hart, the park superintendent at the time, had promised AIM a memorial, no such thing followed after the 1976 protest. The “Second Wounded Knee” of 1973 was still fresh on the NPS’s mind, and Superintendent Hart was well aware of what AIM might feel compelled to do. The superintendent might have promised the memorial simply out of fear of what AIM was capable of if things did not go its way.

The 1976 ceremony and protest did just the opposite of what Means wanted; instead of inspiring the Park Service to fund and build an Indian memorial, it only infuriated the people at the levels to make such a decision. Means’s centennial protest came at a very patriotic time for white Americans, and many of them – particularly the Custer buffs – were offended by Means’s podium takeover, as well as by AIM’s presentation of the American flag: upside-down and dragging on the ground. They felt that Means violated something sacred. The NPS had been intimidated by AIM’s threats of violence, and so had plied to Means’s desires, not out of the want to help him, but out of the need to keep the peace.¹³ Groups outside of the NPS – such as the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association (CBHMA) and the Little Big Horn Associates (LBHA) – felt that Means and AIM needed to be severely punished, and that the battlefield staff should be chastised for its lack of action when dealing with AIM.

The year 1976 was huge for white Americans, and Means knew that his protest would draw plenty of attention because of its timing; however, AIM’s presentation was too offensive to white Americans to bring the changes that AIM desired. If AIM had

¹³ Ibid, 154-155

arrived in a more peaceful style, the superintendent and the various witnesses might have been more willing to help AIM with its cause. Means obviously felt that such disruptive action was necessary in order to get his point heard. Unfortunately, the protest's style became the main focus after the fact, and the NPS did not pursue the Indian memorial that Means had demanded. Perhaps if Means had struck a better balance during his protest – instead of moving in the most offensive direction – he would have had better luck convincing the NPS to build an Indian memorial.

Means's protest set the Indian memorial back likely because it had been too disruptive and too insulting; he did not convince America to listen to his demands. Instead, his offensive actions encouraged Americans to further ignore his pleas. "The 1976 centennial," according to Utley, "left such a bad taste in everyone's mouth, on both sides, that it could have no influence on the memorial. [T]here was no movement underway for a memorial at the time, just talk. And I don't remember even talk after the centennial fiasco."¹⁴

Means and AIM did not get their memorial after the battle's centennial. What they did get was more frustrated and more impatient. After more than a decade passed with no results from Hart's memorial promise, AIM decided to try again. This time, though, the members made sure that all of America would hear about their desire for a memorial; they planned a protest so shocking and offensive that the Park Service, the country, and possibly George Armstrong Custer himself, would not be able to miss the message.

¹⁴ Personal correspondence from Robert Utley, January 4, 2005

Desecration and Creation

After 1976, Russell Means and the American Indian Movement still did not get what they wanted, which was an Indian memorial at the Custer Battlefield. Their choice of presentation during the 1976 protest had turned Americans and the National Park Service against their cause. In 1988, the atmosphere at the battlefield was less charged with the patriotism that had fueled the country during its bicentennial, so a protest in 1988 had much more potential for success. Means and AIM took their chances again, and though their protest was offensive to many, it also opened the NPS up to suggestions for making the dream about an Indian memorial into reality.

In 1976, Means and the American Indian Movement had taken over the speaker's podium; this drew to them a fair amount of attention, but it did not accomplish their goal. By 1988, they had realized that a protest would need to be sharp and noticeable enough to catch attention from the government and from American citizens. No longer could the American Indians be invisible; they had to be obvious, and they had to make their voices heard. AIM opened America's eyes to the American Indians' needs at the Custer Battlefield. The Battle of the Little Bighorn was not a fight among soldiers only; it was a fight between the Cavalry and the American Indian warriors, and AIM felt that it was high time to make this fact more visible to the public.

On June 25, 1988, Russell Means and AIM marched to the top of Last Stand Hill during the battle's commemoration. While Means spoke to the crowd, his fellow AIM members dug a hole in the mass grave underneath the Cavalry monument. When they finished digging, they filled the hole with cement and planted an iron plaque in the ground. The plaque read, "In honor of our Indian Patriots who fought and defeated the

U.S. Calvary [sic]. In doing so, preserving rights to our Homelands, Treaties and sovereignty. 6/25/1988 G. Magpie Cheyenne.”¹ In the absence of a real Indian memorial, AIM had created its own and placed it on the battlefield for all to see. The 1988 protest opened the door for the movement that followed; Means and AIM got their Indian memorial partially because of this transgressive action. The 1988 protest was the most visible part of the Indian memorial movement. Means was never shy in front of a camera,² and there were plenty of media to record the event at the battlefield. He took his opportunity to tell America why AIM was frustrated and angry at the battlefield’s one-sided monuments. The 1988 protest started a chain reaction of change that finally ended in 2003 with the Indian Memorial’s dedication.

Chauncey Whitright III, historian and former AIM member, said that, in 1988, AIM was concerned about the threat of possible violence from the Park Service. Means and AIM had prepared themselves for anything to go wrong, but then the AIM members listened to Austin Two Moon’s Prayer for Peace – which he held on the anniversary to commemorate the occasion – and were inspired by the message of peace and acceptance.³ There were no violent confrontations during the protest.

Means said that AIM intended to return to the battlefield for the “next three years and place more memorial plaques on each side of the white man’s monument – one for the Lakota, one for the Cheyenne, one for the Arapaho, and one for the Crow.”⁴ On his way to the battlefield in 1988, Means had stopped at every reporting office he came across and told the media representatives at each one that he planned to protest at Custer

¹ Linenthal, Edward Tabor. Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1991, 159.

² Personal interview with Neil Mangum, February 7, 2005

³ Personal correspondence from Chauncey Whitright III, February 14, 2005

⁴ Means, Where White Men Fear to Tread, 491

Battlefield. Because of Means's planning, Superintendent Dennis Ditmanson got word that AIM was coming.⁵ He in turn was able to prepare for the protest to prevent any possible violence. The battlefield protest caught plenty of attention; AIM deliberately desecrated a mass grave to prove its point. AIM sent a strong message; if there could be no Indian memorial at the Custer Battlefield, then its members would improvise.

AIM's protest did not go over well with the Custer buffs in the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association (CBHMA) or the Little Big Horn Associates (LBHA). William Wells – an active member with both groups – called the protest a felony and demanded that Means and AIM be punished.⁶ CBHMA and LBHA members were not the only people offended by the protest; many respected battlefield historians were upset as well. Neil Mangum and Robert Reece were leading a tour on the day of the protest in 1988. They arrived back at the Custer Battlefield in the afternoon and heard a “humming” of rumor and speculation among employees and visitors. Mangum and Reece soon learned what Means and AIM had done. Mangum was initially shocked and angry; from a moral viewpoint, AIM had desecrated a grave, and this was a very serious offense to the memory of the dead beneath their feet.⁷ According to Reece, Mangum said that if AIM had dug a few more inches into the mass grave, they would have hit bone.⁸ Now, Mangum understands why AIM did what it did; though the act was inappropriate, it set Indian memorial legislation in motion, and got the country's and government's attention.

⁵ Personal interview with Neil Mangum, February 7, 2005

⁶ Wells, Little Big Horn Associates *Newsletter* Collection. White Swan Memorial Library, hereafter cited as LBHA, WSM. February 1989

⁷ Personal interview with Neil Mangum, February 7, 2005

⁸ Personal correspondence from Robert Reece, March 27, 2005

Historian Paul Hutton agreed; when he heard about the 1988 protest, he was shocked and offended by AIM's desecration.⁹ Now, he understands the protest's intended message. The act brought the memorial to life, and good did come from the bad. Jerome Greene said that AIM was not promoting just an Indian marker in June 1988, but the American Indians' inclusion in all aspects of society.¹⁰ The Custer Battlefield had become a central focus for American Indian issues, so in 1988, it was a good place to make a stand. Means and AIM shoved their cause right in the NPS's face, and it gave the NPS an opportunity to consider exactly what AIM wanted.¹¹ Ultimately, AIM's protest brought much-needed change to the battlefield.

After the protest, many historians and Custer fans questioned Means and AIM for their actions; they wondered why such an offensive protest was necessary at all. These people also questioned the NPS's actions – or the lack of action that some felt should have been used – in not halting the protest. Superintendent Ditmanson defended the NPS; AIM had a history of violence, and Means would have been looking for any opportunity to gain extra publicity for his cause. By allowing Means to speak while AIM members dug the hole for the plaque, the NPS law enforcement ensured the safety of its employees and visitors.

Not surprisingly, AIM's actions infuriated many people, but it also forced them to take notice of the fact that the American Indians were being ignored at the battlefield. After AIM planted its makeshift memorial, the plaque stood on Last Stand Hill for several months as a reminder of why AIM had visited and what their message dictated. The plaque was eventually moved to the visitors' center museum. AIM's protest jump-

⁹ Personal interview with Paul Hutton, March 9, 2005

¹⁰ Personal interview with Jerome Greene, January 13, 2005

¹¹ Ibid

started the Indian memorial. The demand had been made; now it was up to volunteers, cooperating associations, historians, and the NPS to bring the memorial to life.

The Dream Within Reach

Means and the American Indian Movement had made an Indian memorial possible with their confrontational protest on Last Stand Hill in 1988; but the protest was only the start of many years of hard work. The government had to approve an Indian memorial at the Custer Battlefield, and only then could the work of finding a design and a spot for the memorial begin. Persistence paid off; memorial supporters were not prepared to take no for an answer.

The stage had been set to get the American Indians the recognition that they deserved after Russell Means and AIM planted their iron plaque on top of Last Stand Hill. Means brought the publicity, but much work remained to be done. Several historians and battle buffs – including Robert Utley and Means – got the memorial process going. Soon, the memorial had governmental support. Representative Pat Williams, D-Mont, liked the idea, but he also tried to introduce legislation to change the Custer Battlefield name to the Little Bighorn Battlefield.¹ Even though the name change idea was, in general, popular with the memorial supporters, it made the process of getting a memorial more difficult than anticipated.

After AIM's 1988 protest, Utley had the idea to form an American Indian memorial committee and to suggest to the House that, if a bill for a memorial passed, then the design would be decided by a national contest, similar to the one used to determine the design for the Vietnam memorial.² Utley's idea gained support, and soon had representation in the House.

¹ "Indian memorial bill dies", NCF, WSM

² Utley, Custer and Me, 205

Rep. Ron Marlenee, R-Mont, introduced the first legislation for an Indian memorial, along with Rep. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, D-Colo, and Rep. Pat Williams, D-Mont. The first bill designated the spot on which the representatives hoped to see the Indian memorial stand someday: on Last Stand Hill.³ After the first bill's introduction, the news of a possible Indian memorial exploded, and a whole new group of supporters signed on for the cause. Senator Conrad Burns, R-Mont, along with several other senators, including John McCain, introduced the bill to the Senate.

Campbell and the other House supporters, along with many American Indian activists and spokespersons, tried to convince the Select Committee on Indian Affairs of the importance of a memorial during a hearing on September 25, 1990. During his statement, Campbell addressed the importance of American Indian recognition at the battlefield: "It is the only place I know where the monument has been built to the losers."⁴

Other supporters sent letters to the committee to plead their cause. Suzan Shown Harjo, a Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal representative, prepared a statement in support of the Indian Memorial:

It is because of the valor and sacrifice of the past generations of all Indian nations in defense of treaty, sovereign and human rights that there are any Indian people alive today. The heroism of our relatives at the Battle of the Little Bighorn has become the symbol for Indian people generally of the just and provident actions of all our ancestors to protect family and home.

³ "Marlenee offers bill for Indian Memorial", NCF, WSM

⁴ Wounded Knee Memorial and Historic Site Little Big Horn National Monument Battlefield, 13

This is the reason that the legislation before the Senate and our proposed amendments enjoy such widespread support in Indian country.⁵

Though most of the statements called for serious recognition for the American Indian participants in the battle, the bill died in the House because of disagreements over the name change clause. Defeat would not come so easily, however; supporters began preparing for a second attempt at passing the bill.

Marlenee and Campbell teamed up for the cause again, and this time, the bill included more cautious name change provisions; the Indian memorial goal was still the main focus. The name change had its fair share of the spotlight, but supporters made their true intentions known: the memorial was the first concern. Many more hearings and meetings took place in the months leading up to the bill's approval, and Utley made his own statement:

An Indian memorial at Custer Battlefield will pay long-overdue tribute to the Indian dead while also recalling the cause in which they fought. An Indian memorial should not and need not intrude on or diminish the memorialization of the army dead...⁶

The arguments were all on the table; now the memorial supporters had to wait on the final decision.

The Senate approved the bill in November 1991, and House Resolution 848 moved onto President George Bush's desk for the final signature. An article states, "The bill authorizes establishment of an Indian memorial at the battlefield. The measure

⁵ Ibid, 45

⁶ Utley's statement to the "Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, House of Representatives, on H.R. 847, H.R. 848, and H.R. 770, Relating to Custer Battlefield National Monument, Montana, April 23, 1991", 2-3

authorizes funding for the Indian memorial, but the money must still be included in an appropriations bill before it becomes available.”⁷

The House and Senate had approved the memorial, and President George Bush signed his final approval on December 10, 1991.⁸ A memorial would one day stand at the battlefield, but the day on which American Indian and white American visitors could stand together and gaze toward the Spirit Warriors was still a long way off.

⁷ “It’s the Little Bighorn”, NCF, WSM

⁸ H.R. 848 (See Appendix)

Named for the Loser

The first bill to allow an Indian memorial at the Custer Battlefield failed in the House because of a suggestion to change the battlefield's name to the Little Bighorn Battlefield. Though the supporters were concerned mostly with getting a memorial approved, many of them also recognized the importance of changing the site's name. A name change would bring the battlefield one step closer to unity among all groups affiliated with the battle's history. Because of this, many encouraged a name change clause to be added to the bill for the Indian memorial.

Custer's name had been permanently attached to battle's location since the nineteenth century, and this caused some unrest. The name made many American Indians feel that the battlefield had nothing to do with them, and that they did not belong at the site. In reality, the American Indians deserved to be recognized along with the Cavalry soldiers, and the Custer Battlefield name prevented the neutrality that the battlefield needed to recognize both sides equally. Robert Utley pointed out that the Custer Battlefield name was "deeply repugnant" to the American Indians, and that, though it was historically accurate, the name could be compared to the Confederate flag and the offense it caused for black Americans.¹

The Custer Battlefield name remained until American Indians and other supporters celebrated the legislation that passed in 1991 – the same legislation that approved an Indian memorial – and approved the name change of the site to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. The battlefield should not have been named for the loser, name change supporters said, it should have been named for the battle's

¹ Utley, Statement "Before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, House of Representatives, on H.R. 847, H.R. 848, and H.R. 770, Relating to Custer Battlefield National Monument, Montana, April 23, 1991."

location. The old name reflected the attitudes of the past, when Custer was glorified for his death in the battle. The new name brought hope to American Indians and white Americans for a neutral gathering place to act as a site for education about the American West.

In 1990, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, then Democratic House representative for Colorado, called for the name change; he explained that his support for the cause came from a desire for fairness to both sides that participated in the battle: “‘This is in no way meant to take away from the battlefield as it is now or to denigrate the soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry,’ he said. ‘But the ‘other side’ has never been acknowledged there. I think it is time.’”²

Campbell did not have unanimous backing from the public; the name change proposal stirred up emotions on both the supporting and the dissenting sides. The supporters agreed with Campbell’s statements that a name change would properly honor both sides, and remove the insult of acknowledging only Custer for so many years. The opposition deemed the name change as “revisionist history” and condemned it as ridiculously politically correct. Some of Custer’s descendants felt that the change was a personal insult to their family. Custer’s great-grandnephew threatened to pull his family’s artifacts from the museum if the name change happened.³ Custer’s fans were also upset. Writers for the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association (CBHMA’s) *Battlefield Dispatch* sent out opinion cards for members to fill out, hoping to determine a consensus on the name change.⁴ According to the CBHMA president, Ron Nichols,

² “Congressman urges new battlefield name”, NCF, WSM

³ “Battle of the Little Bighorn, Part Two”, NCF, WSM

⁴ Nichols, *The Battlefield Dispatch*, Summer 1991, 2

seventy percent of the members responded as being opposed.⁵ Robert Reece, a CBHMA board member at the time, claimed that president Ron Nichols skewed the poll's results. Only twenty-six members responded to Nichols's poll; seven respondents favored the change. Nichols took the other nineteen responses and used them to claim that the vast majority of CBHMA members were against changing the battlefield's name.⁶

Other CBHMA members wrote scathing letters to the editors of the newsletter, as well as to members of Congress and the House. Some of these dissenters viewed the possible name change as a personal attack on Custer. One member claimed that supporting senators ignored Custer's Civil War performances in order to "disparage the general's memory."⁷ Another reader wrote, "If ever Custer needed some truthful words it is now when he seems to be on trial."⁸

Other members saw the name change as an attempt to re-write history in general, and the beginning of a politically correct conspiracy by which white Americans would soon be ignored. They assumed that the name change attacked tradition and the battlefield's history.⁹ This viewpoint came out even stronger after the name change passed.

The name change bill – House Resolution 848 – passed the House by voice vote in June 1991, and began making its way into the Senate.¹⁰ The initial passing inflamed the opposition even further. One opinion piece stated,

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Personal interview with Bob Reece, March 14, 2005

⁷ Neubauer, LBHA, WSM, September 1991, 6

⁸ Wilke, LBHA, WSM, September 1991, 7

⁹ Sarf, LBHA, WSM, September 1991, 7

¹⁰ "Battlefield change OK'd", NCF, WSM

Traditions, even the most sacred ones, are having about as much luck against liberal orthodoxy as General George Armstrong Custer had against the Indians. And now even poor Custer is about to fall victim to the “political correctness” of the Left...A memorial will be built to honor the Indians who massacred U.S. cavalrymen; thus PC dictates that perpetrators of the massacre be given equal standing to the massacred.¹¹

Some dissenters traveled to the battlefield to protest the House’s decision as well.

Pickers visited the battlefield and touted Custer’s bravery as a reason to keep his name attached to the site.¹²

After the bill had its support, those eager to celebrate a new change at the battlefield met on Veterans Day to commemorate the occasion with anticipation of the bill being signed into law in the following months.¹³ American Indians gathered in the cold to honor their ancestors and to express their joy over the change that would one day lead to an Indian memorial as well. Among the celebrants was Austin Two Moon, whose grandfather fought at the battle. He led a prayer asking for peace between modern-day American Indians and white Americans.¹⁴ Two Moon addressed an audience of visitors that included many who were at the battlefield for the first time, having forsaken the place previously because of the connotations that Custer’s name brought to the site. The name change helped many American Indians to feel welcome at the place of their former victory. Superintendent Barbara Booher remarked that some of her employees felt that

¹¹ “Custer Slain Again By U.S. Vote”, NCF, WSM

¹² “Battlefield bill protested”, NCF, WSM

¹³ “Indians celebrate renaming of famous site”, NCF, WSM

¹⁴ Ibid

the battlefield was becoming a park for the American Indians as well.¹⁵ Two Moon, in his speech and prayer for peace, said, ““We must strive for unity, for peace in unity. I don’t want no war again here in the United States.””¹⁶ There were feelings of relief and of victory in the cold November air. The battlefield name change was one more step toward an actual memorial.

Once President George Bush signed his support in December 1991, the name change became official, but some dissenters took the supporters’ afterglow and turned it into an opportunity to express their discontent. Some Little Big Horn Associates (LBHA) members mourned the name change, calling it a sad event “for all admirers of General Custer.”¹⁷ Others saw the new law as an insult to the military because it supposedly ignored Custer’s sacrifice.¹⁸

The name change at the battlefield meant real change for the American Indians. By allowing the battlefield to take on a new name that honored the history of the place, rather than by inflating one figure of the battle, the Little Bighorn Battlefield became a place that touted a new acceptance. American Indians visited for the first time after the bill’s initial passing, and instead of feeling as if they were visitors on an unknown land, acceptance and justice welcomed them. This dramatic change, courtesy of the American government, set the battlefield down a brand new path, because the same legislation approved an Indian memorial at the site. Soon, not only would the battlefield’s name welcome both American Indians and white Americans, it would also offer a sacred space

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ “Battlefield renaming celebrated”, NCF, WSM

¹⁷ Neubauer, *Newsletter*, February 1992, 3

¹⁸ O’Neil, LBHA, WSM, March 1991, 7

for both to experience and to share with each other. The name change brought the battlefield one step closer to a true Indian memorial.

The Years Between

The government had finally approved an Indian memorial at the newly named Little Bighorn Battlefield, but the memorial itself was still far from completion. First, a design had to be determined, and the process proved to be long and arduous. Even after the memorial's design was in place, the funds to build the memorial still had to be found. The legislation allowing an Indian memorial at the battlefield was only the beginning; the years between its passing in 1991 and the memorial's dedication in 2003 were filled with further setbacks and conflicts.

Plans for the Indian Memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield began immediately after President Bush approved the legislation in December 1991. The National Park Service assembled an Indian Memorial advisory committee to judge incoming designs submitted for the memorial, and to choose the one that they judged would best serve the memorial's selected theme, "Peace Through Unity." This theme was meant to suggest inclusion of all American Indian tribes, white Americans, and other cultures as well. The design had to offer a special place for American Indians to go in order to pay respects to their ancestors, as well as a place for people of other races and cultures to go to learn more about the American Indians, their history, and the events of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.¹

The memorial advisory committee was to consist of eleven members: six of them were to represent each American Indian tribe that participated in the battle; two of them had to be artists; and three of them had to be "knowledgeable in history, historic preservation, and landscape architecture."² The selected memorial design was to be paid

¹ "Design Competition Language for the Little Big Horn Battle Monument"

² Ibid, 1

for with philanthropy,³ and this proved to be the biggest roadblock for the Indian Memorial once the legislation was in place.

Historian Paul Hutton served on the committee; he was also what Robert Utley called one of the two “token whites”⁴ to serve. Both Utley and Neil Mangum suggested that the National Park Service approach Hutton to serve on the advisory committee. Hutton agreed to serve on the committee, and found out later what a long process it would turn out to be. The committee members gave a total of ten unpaid years to the project. They had to attend frequent meetings and had their fair share of disagreements over most of the issues concerning the memorial.⁵

The committee had to decide on a memorial design from among more than 500 entries.⁶ Each jurist had to decide which design best fit the memorial’s theme, and the decision had to be unanimous. Once the committee had eliminated the entries down to three finalists, the process became even more difficult. Each member had differing opinions on the best choice, as well as different arguments for why his or her choice aligned best with “Peace Through Unity.” Finally, according to Hutton, the NPS “locked us in a room for three days” until the committee made a final decision.⁷ The committee was down to three designs. One was shaped like a large teepee, the second was a large, obelisk-like rock formation, and the third was the winning circular, earthen mound design.⁸ The winning artists, John Collins and Allison Towers, submitted a design that included a history of all battle participating tribes, as well as an impressive statue – the

³ Ibid, 11

⁴ Utley, Custer and Me, 213

⁵ Personal interview with Paul Hutton, March 9, 2005

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

Spirit Warriors – that all visitors could enjoy.⁹ On March 21, 1997, the Indian Memorial Advisory Committee selected this as the final design.¹⁰

After the committee selected a winner, the battlefield began the long – and ultimately fruitless – process of finding the funds to build the memorial. The legislation stipulated that “the Secretary [of the Interior] may accept and expend donations of funds, property, or services from individuals, foundations, corporations, or public entities for the purpose of providing for the memorial.”¹¹ When NPS regional director John Cook appointed Neil Mangum as battlefield superintendent in January 1998,¹² Cook’s first – and most important – order for Mangum was to get the Indian memorial up; this became Mangum’s number-one goal, and he took the job very seriously.¹³

Mangum began working closely with the Friends of the Little Bighorn Battlefield, a cooperating organization with the battlefield, in order to raise the two million dollars necessary to build the memorial. Mangum tried contacting organizations and celebrities for private funds for about a year before he realized that the battlefield was spending more money at attempting the fundraising than it was receiving in funds!¹⁴ Mangum finally went to Washington and added funding for the Indian Memorial to an annual appropriations bill for the Department of the Interior.¹⁵ The government paid for the Cavalry monument, and Mangum felt there was no reason it should not pay for the Indian

⁹“ Little Bighorn National Monument Award Winning Design” (See Appendix)

¹⁰ Personal interview with Paul Hutton, March 9, 2005

¹¹ “Design Competition Language for Little Big Horn Battle Monument”, 11-12

¹² Utley, *Custer and Me*, 233

¹³ Personal interview with Neil Mangum, February 7, 2005

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

Memorial as well.¹⁶ By doing this, Mangum earned two and a half million dollars for the memorial.

The road toward the Indian Memorial was long and hard; even after the government approved its legislation, the memorial still faltered in the planning stage, and in funds. Dozens of individuals put their lives into the memorial for years on end, but Mangum – a white southern man with a mission – made it his duty to get the money to finally build the memorial. Without Mangum, the memorial would probably still be missing from the Little Bighorn Battlefield’s landscape. Mangum left his legacy at the Little Bighorn Battlefield. His efforts will be embodied in the Indian Memorial for all future generations to experience.¹⁷

Even after Mangum got the funds for the memorial, it was not until June 25, 2003, that the memorial was actually dedicated. Some of the delay came from construction setbacks, but others came from continuing disagreement among American Indian tribes about just how the memorial was to be presented, and when. Some of the disagreement occurred between American Indian tribes. The Crow and Arikira who had fought with Custer, and the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho who had fought against Custer could not agree on the tribal informative panels inside the memorial, or whether the tribal flags – which were a part of the winning design – should fly outside of the memorial. Finally, a temporary solution was agreed upon; the flags would stay down, and the informative panels would be temporary ones until the tribes could reach further agreement. The flags still do not fly, and the panels have not been permanently etched.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ “An Indian Memorial for Little Bighorn”, NCF, WSM

Though the years after Means's 1988 protest were turbulent ones for the Indian memorial, they were also the most productive; change had finally come to the battlefield, and balance between the two sides was close at hand. The day was near when both American Indians and white Americans could enjoy an Indian memorial together, and share in the history lesson it would provide.

“It’s a Done Deal.”

Even though the Indian memorial’s design, location, and funding had been decided, there were still people who disliked the idea considerably. They took opportunity to discourage the memorial and to criticize the people who had made the memorial possible by using various media outlets that they had created for themselves, and they also wrote letters to Congress representatives and their area newspapers in order to make their displeasure more widely known.

Though the supporting voices for the Indian memorial were loudly projected through the many media outlets they took advantage of, there were also people speaking out against the newly approved Indian memorial. These dissenters were not as widely heard as the supporters, but they still represented a lasting echo of disapproval for the Indian memorial. The dissenters were a reminder of why the memorial had been so long in coming; though they were in the minority at the end of the twentieth century, they had been a part of the majority in the previous decades.

Former battlefield Superintendent Neil Mangum explained a bit about the extent of the criticisms coming from this minority. Though many of the complaints stemmed from concern over the battlefield’s condition and the fear that a new memorial might further harm the landscape, some of the criticism came from what Mangum believed to be racism.¹ Mangum said that racist dissenters claimed concern for the battlefield, and insisted that the memorial be built off of Last Stand Hill, so as not to interfere with the Cavalry monument. They also refused to accept the funding that Mangum had managed to receive from the government in order to build the memorial; they insisted that philanthropy fund the memorial, even though the government had funded the 1881

¹ Personal interview with Neil Mangum, February 7, 2005

monument.² Mangum believed that they simply did not want a monument to the American Indians anywhere on the battlefield, especially not placed to draw attention from their image of a heroic Custer.

Mangum said that a lot of the complainers would make sure to tell him that they were not opposed to the idea of an Indian Memorial at all, but that they had concerns over its placement or funding. Mangum shrugged this off, believing that if they really were not opposed to a memorial at all, then they would not care where the money came from, and that they would not be so concerned over where the monument stood once it was finished.³ All Mangum could tell them was that the memorial was a “done deal”.⁴ The process was underway at that point, and there was nothing anyone could do to stop the construction and dedication.

Some of the dissenters did try; though they were not able to prevent the memorial, they did make the process difficult and painful for Mangum and some of the other project contributors. The dissent was concentrated heavily among a few members of the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association (CBHMA), and the Little Big Horn Associates (LBHA). The most outspoken people were not necessarily representing the entire roster of members in these two groups, but the media projected their voices loudly. Each organization published letters from members and readers in their respective newsletters, and these newsletters are where some of the loudest displeasure over the memorial can be found.

The LBHA *Newsletter* published many complaints over the years leading up to the Indian Memorial’s completion. One letter stated, “What’s next? A Shinto temple to

² Rickey, *History of Custer Battlefield*, 61

³ Personal interview with Neil Mangum, February 7, 2005

⁴ Ibid

the Japanese Air Force on the site of the Arizona? How about a posthumous Oscar to John Wilkes Booth at the Ford Theatre for ‘Outstanding Performance By An Actor’?

The world has obviously gone mad.”⁵ Another letter asks,

Why not show the scalplings and mutilation of the troopers? It happened, and many times. I notice the illegal ‘Russell Means’ plaque is still in the patio with its reference to (the mass murder of) ‘our women and children.’ ...Visitors don’t come here for that. They want to know what happened, not why. I feel the same way. Did my ancestors steal an incredible amount of Indian land? Yes, they sure did. Do I feel guilty? Absolutely not!!...I like the way it turned out...We should shut down all of the Indian reservations, give the land to each individual Indian, and let them join the mainstream of American life and close the B.I.A. [Bureau of Indian Affairs]...No monuments where Indians fell at the battle? No one knows who, where or how many fell. This is an unfair accusation.⁶

Wells introduced many points that the opposition used during the fight over the Indian memorial, one more being that the white Americans won the Indian wars, if not the Little Bighorn battle, so they should have been the ones to place the monuments.

As for Wells’s argument that visitors would not care to know about the cultural and sociological aspects of the battlefield, he was wrong. According to Mangum, American Indians were not the only people unhappy about the absence of a memorial for the warriors. Visitors wanted more equal representation for both sides at the battlefield as well. Before the memorial was built, Mangum would often read visitor sign-in sheets

⁵ Armstrong, LBHA, WSM, November 1988

⁶ Wells, LBHA, WSM, February 1990

with comments asking for an Indian memorial. They were aware that nothing on the battlefield stood for the warriors; they had come to see both sides, and they left after learning about only one. Wells tried very hard to discourage an Indian memorial near Last Stand Hill, but his discouragements were drowned out by loud encouragements from other groups and individuals.

Wells also stated that “...no one knows where, or how many...” American Indians fell during the battle, and so recognizing their locations at the times of their deaths would be unnecessary, if not impossible. Time has proved Wells wrong in this arena as well. Ever since Mrs. Thomas Beaverheart sent a letter to the War Department superintendent in 1925, requesting a marker for her father, Lame White Man, the effort to mark where warriors fell – as well as the effort to memorialize their sacrifices – has been underway.⁷ In May 1999, the first two permanent warrior markers were placed after Park Historian John Doerner’s research revealed where Noisy Walking and Lame White Man fell during the Custer fight. Stone cairns and personal accounts led Doerner to the correct spots.⁸

Though some of this dissent is offensive, most of those in opposition were not as radical as Armstrong and Wells. Many of the individuals opposed to the memorial were genuinely concerned for the welfare of the site, and wanted to maintain the preserved state that it was already in. According to Jerome Greene, author and National Park Service historian, many of the dissenters had the battlefield’s preservation in mind.⁹ The battlefield was a place that many people saw as hallowed ground; it was stained with the blood of America’s soldiers, as well as the blood of native people. The granite Cavalry

⁷ “The Indian Memorial at Little Bighorn National Monument: Peace Through Unity”, 1

⁸ Doerner, *Research Review*, “So That the Place Might be Remembered”

⁹ Personal interview with Jerome Greene, January 13, 2005

obelisk had already scarred the landscape, and there were fears that another monument would further move the battlefield down a path of circus-like appearance.

Many of the dissenters shared a very special and emotional connection to the battlefield as well. For as long as they had been aware, the battlefield had been “Custer’s.” George Armstrong Custer was a hero to them; when they thought back to the history of the battlefield, they pictured a brave man who died with his gun empty, and the bodies of his followers scattered around him. The thought of an Indian memorial on the place where Custer fell was likely frightening to these people; a fantasy from their childhoods that had lasted up until this point in their lives was about to change, and this was a difficult thing to accept. Greene speculated that these dissenters had trouble observing the battle of the Little Bighorn in a broad historical sense; to them, Custer was a hero, and he made America look like a heroic country. They struggled to see the battlefield in any other light.¹⁰

During the semi-centennial observance of the battle in 1926, a “Bury the Hatchet” ceremony took place. Participants on the American Indian, as well as the American soldier side, met and shook hands in order to symbolize their new friendship in the wake of the battle, and to forgive and forget what happened on that day.¹¹ Chief Red Hawk represented the Sioux Nation, and he addressed General Godfrey, a participant in the battle:

I do not blame any individual for the trouble that arose between the Indian race and the White race; but personally I feel today that I would like to see the trouble right here, so that we could both of us, on both sides, fight that

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Personal Interview with John Doerner, February 3, 2005

one common enemy...so that we would have no trouble forever. In view of that, I see you all; and I see you as brothers and sisters. It makes my heart so glad to see all of you on friendly terms with the Indians, and I hope that lasts forever...So today we meet again once more, and I hope it is final; we shall seal friendship which shall never be broken again; I am glad today that I am with you today [sic]. I thank you.¹²

General E.S. Godfrey said:

Time out of mind, the hatchet has been with the red race the symbol of war. We now unite in the ceremony of burying the hatchet, holding it a covenant of our common citizenships and everlasting peace. We pray to the god of our fathers, the great spirit, to insure this covenant to all future generations.¹³

The two participants of the battle shook hands in their attempt to “bury the hatchet” as a symbol of future peace between their people.

Doerner expressed some puzzlement over the contradictions between that day in 1926, and the days before the Indian memorial became a reality in 2003. These men who had fought each other on the field of battle, one on Custer’s side, and one on Crazy Horse’s side, were able to forgive and forget. The dissenters did not take this ceremony into account when they thought of the American Indians as present-day adversaries to be fought.¹⁴ They could not all grasp the reconciliation that had taken place fifty years after the battle. If Chief Red Hawk and General Godfrey were able to lay aside their former

¹² The Custer Semi-Centennial Ceremonies: 1876 – June 25-26 – 1926, Hawkins, 40

¹³ *Ibid*, 42

¹⁴ Personal interview with John Doerner, February 3, 2005

fight and embrace each other's differences, then the opposition against the Indian memorial should have been able to do the same.

The Spirit Warriors Ride

Even though some people were not willing to accept the concept of an Indian memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield, the spirits of reconciliation prevailed. After twelve long years of slogging through the governmental, funding, and construction processes, the Indian Memorial was finally ready for its dedication. The event was

nothing short of spectacular, and the completed memorial stood in triumph for all the visitors – white American, American Indian, and all others – to behold.

June 24, 2003, was cool and cloudy; visitors who arrived at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument had come prepared for the usual hot, balmy Montana summer weather. Instead, they huddled shivering, in close groups on the White Swan Memorial Library lawn to eat dinner and to watch Superintendent Darrell Cook's honors ceremony. All of those invited glanced pensively up toward the visitors' center, and past that to Last Stand Hill, where they knew the new Indian Memorial finally stood.

During the ceremony, Cook honored the people who had most contributed to the Indian Memorial's cause, among them Chauncey Whitright III, John Collins and Allison Towers (the designers), and Neil Mangum. Kevin Connelly, the acting Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association (CBHMA) president, received a medal. In the past few years, the most outspoken dissenters in the organization had split off to create their own newsletter – *The Advocate* – dedicated to criticizing the NPS for allowing AIM's protest in 1988. The remainder of the CBHMA representatives had become far more helpful to the battlefield in the ensuing years. Robert Reece, president of the Friends of the Little Bighorn Battlefield, received a medal and a woven blanket in thanks for his persistence with getting the memorial built at last.

After the ceremony, Neil Mangum led the crowd to the Custer National Cemetery to tell a few of his stories about the various people buried there since 1876, but all eyes still strayed up to Last Stand Hill. Finally, with hands and faces numb from the cold, Mangum led the impatient crowd up the steep hill toward the Cavalry monument. Instead of turning right at the obelisk, however, Mangum turned left and strode toward

the sunken earthen mound where the Spirit Warriors rode. Some of the entourage wiped away tears, and others gasped with joy; every bit of work, suffering, and determination had paid off. The Indian Memorial stood at last, a final answer to Custer's visit.

June 25th dawned slightly warmer, and the crowd's excitement was like a constant humming in the air. After decades of persistence, the Little Bighorn Battlefield dedicated its new Indian Memorial. More than 4,000 visitors attended the ceremonies and took the opportunity to enjoy a barbequed buffalo lunch around noon, compliments of the Western National Parks Association. The crowds were so huge that parking at the battlefield was impossible. Instead, buses shuttled visitors from a parking lot nearby.¹

Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell spoke at one of the many ceremonies, as did Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. Both expressed joy over the memorial's dedication, and acknowledged the fighting that was necessary to make it a reality. Russell Means showed up as well; he wore a red shirt and a war bonnet and rode to the podium on horseback.² He mentioned the 1976 and 1988 protests, and claimed that he did not know in 1988 that the monument on Last Stand Hill stood upon a mass grave. He said that if he had known this, he would have led AIM to plant the plaque on a different spot.³ Reece later pointed out that, even in 1988, there were brown NPS signs on each side of the mass grave that identified the site as a burial place, so Means should have known over what he was walking.⁴

The ceremonies were an overall success, but some attendees were still disappointed with the outcome. Chauncey Whitright III was upset that all battle

¹ "Thousands see dedication of Indian Memorial at Little Bighorn," NCF, WSM

² "Activist Means steals the show at dedication," NCF, WSM

³ Ibid

⁴ Personal correspondence from Robert Reece, March 27, 2005

participating tribes did not interact with each other in the spirit of “Peace Through Unity.” Each tribe separated itself from the others for ceremonies and commemorations, and Whitright hoped that they all would be able to work together.⁵ Whitright has since said that he feels the Indian Memorial can offer something to all Americans, and not just to American Indians. He stated that the memorial would serve as an educational opportunity for all future American generations.⁶ The memorial can offer a truthful explanation about the American Indians’ history in this country, and what that history means to the Little Bighorn Battlefield. The fight was long and hard, and it turned out well, but unity between races, and among tribes, is not always simple. “It is a daily challenge in any individual’s life if he or she desires to seek out Peace Through Unity.”⁷

An Indian memorial now stands at the battlefield, but it is still not finished. The interpretive panels lining the inside are supposed to tell something about each participating tribe. The panels that are mounted now are still not permanent; some of the tribes disagree about what each panel should say, and some tribes are still opposed to the Indian Memorial’s representation of the Crow and the Arikira – the tribes with Custer – being a part of the memorial at all.

Perhaps someday, the same drives and desires that brought the Indian Memorial to the battlefield can completely unite all groups involved. For now, though, the memorial offers a place for American Indians to go and remember their ancestors, as well as a place for the other visitors to go to learn more about the American Indians and the fight that they won against Custer in 1876.

⁵ “Activist Means steals the show at dedication,” NCF, WSM

⁶ Personal correspondence from Chauncey Whitright III, March 1, 2005

⁷ Ibid

The Little Bighorn Battlefield honored the American Indian participants at last, but not without the fight that was essential to the cause. American Indians made themselves visible in the 1970s with the “Second Wounded Knee.” They fought the invisibility that had come from decades of neglect from the American government, the American people, and the history books that taught them all. American Indians had protested and demanded an Indian memorial. These protests spurred the NPS and the government into action. Even such volatile acts helped to bring about a greater good. American Indians and white Americans alike showed vigilance after the protests in bringing the cause to fruition. They carried the fight so that future generations might have a way of remembering their own heritage, be it white, American Indian, or anything else. This combination of visibility, protest, and vigilance made the Indian Memorial a reality, and now, each visitor can tread on a dirt spot at the battlefield with deep and sacred meanings. Visibility, protest, and vigilance shared a place in the passion of the Americans who made the Indian Memorial a reality. Former NPS Regional Director John Cook explains, “...this nation is one of passion and sometimes that passion is misdirected, other times it finds the river’s channels and runs true, fast[,] and deep. In the end we got our memorial, the name change[,] and ongoing knowledge about the cultures of America, including those who were ‘forgotten.’”⁸ At last, Custer and Crazy Horse can share the battlefield in peace and unity.

⁸ Personal correspondence from John Cook, March 26, 2005

APPENDIX

Little Bighorn

105 STAT. 1631 PUBLIC LAW 102–201—DEC. 10, 1991

Public Law 102–201

102d Congress

An Act

Dec. 10, 1991

[H.R. 848]

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the
United States of America in Congress assembled,*

TITLE I

SEC. 101. REDESIGNATION OF MONUMENT.

The Custer Battlefield National Monument in Montana shall, on and after the date of enactment of this Act, be known as the “Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument” (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “monument”). Any reference to the Custer Battlefield National Monument in any law, map, regulation, document, record or other paper of the United States shall be deemed to be a reference to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

SEC. 102. CUSTER NATIONAL CEMETERY.

The cemetery located within the monument shall be designated as the Custer National Cemetery.

TITLE II

SEC. 201. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds that—

- (1) a monument was erected in 1881 at Last Stand Hill to commemorate the soldiers, scouts, and civilians attached to the 7th United States Cavalry who fell in the Battle of the Little Bighorn;
- (2) while many members of the Cheyenne, Sioux, and other Indian Nations gave their lives defending their families and traditional lifestyle and livelihood, nothing stands at the battlefield to commemorate those individuals; and
- (3) the public interest will best be served by establishing a memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument to honor the Indian participants in the battle.

SEC. 202. ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of the Interior (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Secretary”) shall establish a committee to be known as the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Advisory Committee (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Advisory Committee”).

(b) MEMBERSHIP AND CHAIRPERSON.—The Advisory Committee shall be composed of 11 members appointed by the Secretary, with 6 of the individuals appointed representing Native American tribes who participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn or who now reside in the area, 2 of the individuals appointed being nationally recognized artists and 3 of the individuals appointed being knowledgeable in history, historic preservation, and landscape architecture. The Advisory Committee shall designate one of its members as Chairperson.

(c) QUORUM; MEETINGS.—Six members of the Advisory Committee shall constitute a quorum. The Advisory Committee shall act and advise by affirmative vote of a majority of the members voting at a meeting at which a quorum is present. The Advisory Committee shall meet on a regular basis. Notice of meetings and agenda shall be published in local newspapers which have a distribution which generally covers the area affected by the monument. Advisory Committee meetings shall be held at locations and in such a manner as to ensure adequate public involvement.

(d) ADVISORY FUNCTIONS.—The Advisory Committee shall advise the Secretary to insure that the memorial designed and constructed as provided in section 203 shall be appropriate to the monument, its resources and landscape, sensitive to the history being portrayed and artistically commendable.

(e) TECHNICAL STAFF SUPPORT.—In order to provide staff support and technical services to assist the Advisory Committee in carrying out its duties under this Act, upon request of the Advisory Committee, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to detail any personnel of the National Park Service to the Advisory Committee.

(f) COMPENSATION.—Members of the Advisory Committee shall serve without compensation but shall be entitled to travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in the same manner as persons employed intermittently in Government service under section 5703 of title 5 of the United States Code.

(g) CHARTER.—The provisions of section 14(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. Appendix; 86 Stat. 776), are hereby waived with respect to the Advisory Committee.

(h) TERMINATION.—The Advisory Committee shall terminate upon dedication of the memorial authorized under section 203.

SEC. 203. MEMORIAL.

(a) DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, AND MAINTENANCE.—In order to honor and recognize the Indians who fought to preserve their land and culture in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, to provide visitors with an improved understanding of the events leading up to and the consequences of the fateful battle, and to encourage peace among

people of all races, the Secretary shall design, construct, and maintain a memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

(b) SITE.—The Secretary, in consultation with the Advisory Committee, shall select the site of the memorial. Such area shall be located on the ridge in that part of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument which is in the vicinity of the 7th Cavalry Monument, as generally depicted on a map entitled “Custer Battlefield National Monument General Development Map” dated March 1990 and numbered 381/80,044-A.

(c) DESIGN COMPETITION.—The Secretary, in consultation with the Advisory Committee, shall hold a national design competition to select the design of the memorial. The design criteria shall include but not necessarily be limited to compatibility with the monument and its resources in form and scale, sensitivity to the history being portrayed, and artistic merit. The design and plans for the memorial shall be subject to the approval of the Secretary.

SEC. 204. DONATIONS OF FUNDS, PROPERTY, AND SERVICES.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary may accept and expend donations of funds, property, or services from individuals, foundations, corporations, or public entities for the purpose of providing for the memorial.

SEC. 205. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary to carry out this Act.

* * * * *

Approved December 10, 1991.

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