

HELENA DAILY HERALD
EXTRA

July 4, 1876

A TERRIBLE FIGHT

Gen. Custer and his Nephew

KILLED

The Seventh Cavalry cut to pieces

The Whole Number Killed 315

*From our Special Correspondent
Mr. W. H. Norton*

Stillwater, M. T.,
July 2nd, 1876.

Muggins Taylor, scout for Gen. Gibbons, got here last night, direct from Little Horn River with telegraphic despatches. General Custer found the Indian camp of about two thousand lodges on the Little Horn, and immediately attacked the camp. Custer took five companies and charged the thickest portion of the camp.

Nothing is Known of the Operation

of this detachment, only as they trace it by the dead. Major Reno commanded the other seven companies and attacked the lower portion of the camp. The Indians poured in a murderous fire from all directions. Besides the greater portion fought on horseback. Custer, his two brothers, a nephew and a brother-in-law were

All Killed

and not one of his detachment escaped, 207 men were buried in one place and the killed are estimated at 300 with only 31 wounded. The Indians surrounded Reno's command and held them one day in the hills

Cut Off from Water

until Gibbons's command came in sight, when they broke camp in the night and left.

The Seventh Fought Like Tigers

and were overcome by mere brute force. The Indian loss cannot be estimated, as they bore off and cached most of their killed. The remnant of the Seventh Cavalry and Gibbon's command are returning to the mouth of the Little Horn, where the steamboat lies. The Indians got all the arms of the killed soldiers. There were seventeen commissioned officers killed.

The Whole Custer Family

died at the head of their column. The exact loss is not known as both Adjutants and the Sergeant Major were killed. The Indian camp was from three to four miles along and was twenty miles up the Little Horn from its mouth. The Indians actually pulled men off their horses in some instances. I give this as Taylor told me, as he was over the field after the battle.

The above is confirmed by other letters which say Custer met a fearful disaster.

The next day, the *Herald* followed its July fourth Extra with a short editorial which read:

HELENA DAILY HERALD

Wednesday, July 5, 1876

EDITORIAL

The news received last evening of the defeat of Custer and the massacre of his entire command, fell upon the festivities of the day with a gloom that could not be shaken off. There is only too much reason to believe that the facts given in the extras of last evening are literally true. The parties from whom the facts were received are too well known to leave a reasonable doubt.

Questions

1. What underlying assumptions and values are made explicit here about U.S. and Native American fighting men?
2. What effect was the story intended to have on readers?

16-7 A Century of Dishonor (1881)

Helen Hunt Jackson

Born in Amherst, Massachusetts, Helen Hunt Jackson (1830–1885) was raised in the New England moral climate that nurtured the abolitionist and woman suffrage movements of the mid-nineteenth century. However, this childhood friend of Emily Dickinson showed no interest in reform causes until her second marriage and her move to Colorado in 1875. Ironically, it was during a trip to Boston in 1879 that Jackson heard the Ponca chief Standing Bear speak on the plight of the Plains Indians.

The incident served as a conversion experience, and Jackson began making herself an expert on the history of relations between the government and Native Americans. Within two years she published *A Century of Dishonor*. Not all readers were pleased with Jackson's condemnation of the government for its mistreatment of Native Americans. Because the book was "written in good English" by an author "intensely in earnest," Theodore Roosevelt feared that it was "capable of doing great harm."

Source: Excerpt from Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, (1881), 338–342.

In 1869 President Grant appointed a commission of nine men, representing the influence and philanthropy of six leading States, to visit the different Indian reservations, and to "examine all matters appertaining to Indian affairs."

In the report of this commission are such paragraphs as the following: "To assert that 'the Indian will not work' is as true as it would be to say that the white man will not work.

"Why should the Indian be expected to plant corn, fence lands, build houses, or do anything but get food from day to day, when experience has taught him that the product of his labor will be seized by the white man to-morrow? The most industrious white man would become a drone under similar circumstances. Nevertheless, many of the Indians" (the commissioners might more forcibly have said 130,000 of the Indians) "are already at work, and furnish ample refutation of the assertion that 'the Indian will not work.' There is no escape from the inexorable logic of facts.

"The history of the Government connections with the Indians is a shameful record of broken treaties and unfulfilled promises. The history of the border white man's connection with the Indians is a sickening record of murder, outrage, robbery, and wrongs committed by the former, as the rule, and occasional savage outbreaks and unspeakably barbarous deeds of retaliation by the latter, as the exception.

"Taught by the Government that they had rights entitled to respect, when those rights have been assailed by the rapacity of the white man, the arm which should have been raised to protect them has ever been ready to sustain the aggressor.

"The testimony of some of the highest military officers of the United States is on record to the effect that, in our Indian wars, almost without exception, the first aggressions have been made by the white man; and the assertion is supported by every civilian of reputation who has studied the subject. In addition to the class of robbers and outlaws who find impunity in their nefarious pursuits on the frontiers, there is a large class of professedly reputable men who use every means in their power to bring on Indian wars for the sake of the profit to be realized from the presence of troops and the expenditure of Government funds in their midst. They proclaim death to the Indians at all times in words and publications, making no distinction between the innocent and the guilty. They irate the lowest class of men to the perpetration of the darkest deeds against their victims, and as judges and jurymen shield them from the justice due to their crimes. Every crime committed by a white man against an Indian is concealed or palliated. Every offence

committed by an Indian against a white man is borne on the wings of the post or the telegraph to the remotest corner of the land, clothed with all the horrors which the reality or imagination can throw around it. Against such influences as these the people of the United States need to be warned."

To assume that it would be easy, or by any one sudden stroke of legislative policy possible, to undo the mischief and hurt of the long past, set the Indian policy of the country right for the future, and make the Indians at once safe and happy, is the blunder of a hasty and uninformed judgment. The notion which seems to be growing more prevalent, that simply to make all Indians at once citizens of the United States would be a sovereign and instantaneous panacea for all their ills and all the Government's perplexities, is a very inconsiderate one. To administer complete citizenship of a sudden, all round, to all Indians, barbarous and civilized alike, would be as grotesque a blunder as to dose them all round with any one medicine, irrespective of the symptoms and needs of their diseases. It would kill more than it would cure. Nevertheless, it is true, as was well stated by one of the superintendents of Indian Affairs in 1857, that, "so long as they are not citizens of the United States, their rights of property must remain insecure against invasion. The doors of the federal tribunals being barred against them while wards and dependents, they can only partially exercise the rights of free government, or give to those who make, execute, and construe the few laws they are allowed to enact, dignity sufficient to make them respectable. While they continue individually to gather the crumbs that fall from the table of the United States, idleness, improvidence, and indebtedness will be the rule, and industry, thrift, and freedom from debt the exception. The utter absence of individual title to particular lands deprives every one among them of the chief incentive to labor and exertion—the very mainspring on which the prosperity of a people depends."

All judicious plans and measures for their safety and salvation must embody provisions for their becoming citizens as fast as they are fit, and must protect them till then in every right and particular in which our laws protect other "persons" who are not citizens.

There is a disposition in a certain class of minds to be impatient with any protestation against wrong which is unaccompanied or unprepared with a quick and exact scheme of remedy. This is illogical. When pioneers in a new country find a tract of poisonous and swampy wilderness to be

reclaimed, they do not withhold their hands from fire and axe till they see clearly which way roads should run, where good water will spring, and what crops will best grow on the redeemed land. They first clear the swamp. So with this poisonous and baffling part of the domain of our national affairs—let us first “clear the swamp.”

However great perplexity and difficulty there may be in the details of any and every plan possible for doing at this late day anything like justice to the Indian, however hard it may be for good statesmen and good men to agree upon the things that ought to be done, there certainly is, or ought to be, no perplexity whatever, no difficulty whatever, in agreeing upon certain things that ought not to be done, and which

must cease to be done before the first steps can be taken toward righting the wrongs, curing the ills, and wiping out the disgrace to us of the present condition of our Indians.

Cheating, robbing, breaking promises—these three are clearly things which must cease to be done. One more thing, also, and that is the refusal of the protection of the law to the Indian’s rights of property, “of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

When these four things have ceased to be done, time, statesmanship, philanthropy, and Christianity can slowly and surely do the rest. Till these four things have ceased to be done, statesmanship and philanthropy alike must work in vain, and even Christianity can reap but small harvest.

Questions

1. Why didn’t official reports that were critical of U.S. government policy toward Native Americans have a greater effect on the American public?
2. What was the importance of granting citizenship to Native Americans? What problems with granting citizenship does Jackson see?
3. What was Jackson’s prescription for improved relations with Native Americans?

16-8 The Dawes Severalty Act (1887)

Congress responded to Helen Hunt Jackson and other critics of its Native American policy with the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887. The act attempted to “mainstream” Indians into American society: reservations were to be abolished, and Native Americans were to be given land. The act accomplished little beyond reducing the amount of land under Native American control, and the reservation policy was revived in the 1930s.

Source: Excerpt from United States, *Statutes at Large*, 24:388 ff.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That in all cases where any tribe or band of Indians has been, or shall hereafter be, located upon any reservation created for their use, either by treaty stipulation or by virtue of an act of Congress or executive order setting apart the same for their use, the President of the United States be, and he hereby is, authorized, whenever in his opinion any reservation or any part thereof of such Indians is advantageous for agricultural and grazing purposes, to cause said reservation, or any part thereof, to be surveyed, or resurveyed if necessary, and to allot the lands in said reservation in severalty to any Indian located thereon in quantities as follows:

To each head of a family, one-quarter of a section;

To each single person over eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section;

To each orphan child under eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section; and

To each other single person under eighteen years now living, or who may be born prior to the date of the order of the President directing an allotment of the lands embraced in any reservation, one-sixteenth of a section: *Provided*, That in case there is not sufficient land in any of said reservations to allot lands to each individual of the classes above named in quantities as above provided, the lands embraced in such reservation or reservations shall be allotted to each individual of each of said classes pro rata in accordance with the provisions of this act: *And provided further*, That where the treaty or act of Congress setting apart such reservation provides for the allotment of lands in severalty in quantities in excess of those herein provided, the President, in making allotments upon such reservation, shall allot the lands to each