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what happened, the people kept creating.

The first known book of ledger art arrived in Denver (then Denver City) on Sept. 28, 1864. It was carried by a 7-year-old captive named Ambrose Asher. No one knows who made the book. It was given to Asher in the village of Cheyenne leader Black Kettle, who was returning Asher as part of a diplomatic mission to make peace with the settlers of the Colorado Territory.

Not long later, on the morning of Nov. 29, more than 150 Cheyenne and Arapaho, including many women and children, were brutally killed by more than 700 soldiers commanded by Col. John Chivington.

In a speech delivered in Denver shortly before the massacre, Chivington had publicly advocated for the killing and scalping of all Indian people, including children, declaring, "Nits make lice."

Arriving at Fort Lyon a day before the massacre, Chivington talked to fellow officers about "collecting scalps" and "wading in gore." When other officers protested against attacking a camp that had been promised safety in exchange for peace, Chivington became violent and, according to sources at the time, said: "I have come to kill Indians. And believe it is right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians."

The majority of those killed by Chivington that day were women and children – 105 in all. Chivington and his men then decorated their weapons and hats with their body parts, including fetuses, penises, breasts and vulvas, and put them on public display before crowds in Denver, according to reports. Although the event was well-documented, none of the men responsible was prosecuted. The only repercussion for Chivington was a formal rebuke from Congress – an effective block on his future political career.

Black Kettle had attempted to stop the attack by flying a white flag, as he was told this would always guarantee safety. But no one stopped the attack. Black Kettle managed to escape. Later, after finding out that George Armstrong Custer was planning to lead an attack on unarmed civilians at the Southern Cheyenne Reservation at Washita Creek, Black Kettle and his wife decided to reason with Custer and approached him unarmed with a raised white flag on Nov. 27, 1868. Custer ordered his soldiers to fire on them – the same order he would later give for over a hundred Cheyenne women and children killed later that day.

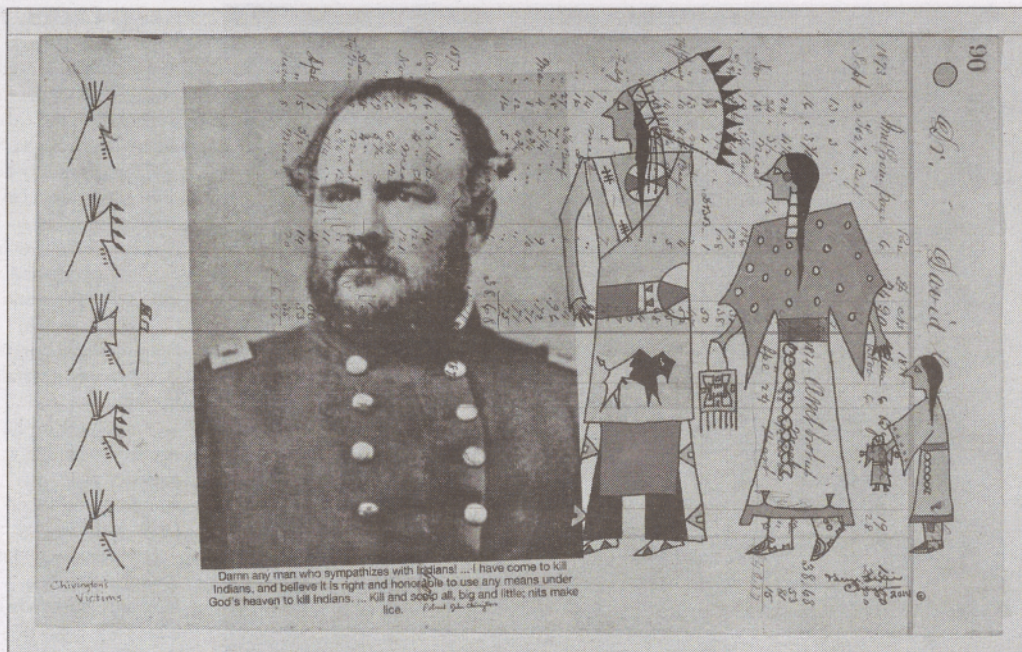
After the later massacre at Wounded Knee, Congress bestowed Medals of Honor upon the soldiers responsible.

"What were actually massacres, they were glorified as battles, as heroic deeds," Levi said.

"The people believe what they want to believe, but the press, the press back in the day, they had so much control, and they re-wrote their own history at times.

"What's the better news: you heroically killed off 300 warriors, or you killed off 300 women and children?"

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, who was interviewed by Street Roots last February, has written extensively on the connection between the historic genocide of Native



Ledger art depicting Col. John Chivington and the Sand Creek massacre.

BY GEORGE CURTIS LEVI

America's roots in white supremacy: How the oppressed became the oppressors

BY STEPHYN QUIRKE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The extraordinary violence exhibited at Sand Creek, and the widespread ignorance of that violence among non-natives, is a reminder that both U.S. identity and standard U.S. history is premised on white supremacy.

The violent seizing of Native American land was the American counterpart to the earlier process of European "enclosure," which privatized lands worked and lived on collectively by farmers, shepherds, hunters and gatherers. Such movements produced a mass of desperate, uprooted people at the mercy of urban industry. In Europe, these people were offered the newly plundered lands overseas as a substitute for their historic common lands. The newly imagined category of "whiteness," shorn of any particular place or family ties, encouraged lower-class Europeans to imagine themselves as being part of a grand military project, together with the elites who controlled them. The elite campaign against backwards peasants whose land had to be taken for "improvement" could now be transferred onto foreign "savages" whose land had to be taken to satisfy the "land hunger" of impoverished whites, who at any rate would soon "improve" the land and replicate Europe's urban industrial nightmare.

One of George Curtis Levi's mixed-media pieces calls directly to this, and features a flyer posted Aug. 13, 1864, that begins "ATTENTION! INDIAN FIGHTERS" and promises that militia volunteers "will also be entitled to all horses and other plunder taken from the Indians."

In effect, medieval despotism and its reactionaries were dumped out onto the

new world – and the doctrine of white supremacy melded them all together. Colonial violence elevated lower-class whites to higher positions of power.

This path was not inevitable. Throughout this period, many tribes maintained friendly relations with white settlers and inter-married with them, producing fascinating counterpoints to the cultural underpinnings of U.S. empire. In places like New York, early settlers were strongly influenced by the egalitarian social structure of the Iroquois Confederacy – including early feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the framers of the Constitution. They also inspired Friedrich Engels through anthropological accounts of modern-day matriarchy – accounts that he used to support a theory of revolution in "The Origin of Family, Private Property, and The State."

Summarizing the actual failure to learn from Native Americans and enter into respectful relationships with them, the historian Lewis Mumford once said, "In the long run, it was the cultural interchanges that would prove important, and it was Western man's unreadiness for cooperative two-way intercourse – his egoism, his vanity, his reluctance to learn from those he conquered, and not least his calculated ferocity – that actually wiped out many of the potential advantages of the New Exploration."

Ortiz writes: "Indigenous peoples offer possibilities for life after empire." And in getting past empire-building, "the continent will be radically reconfigured, physically and psychologically. For the future to be realized, it will require extensive educational programs and the full support and active participation of the descendants of settlers, enslaved Africans, and colonized Mexicans, as well as immigrant populations."

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