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CROWNS OF HONOR
SACRED LAWS OF EAGLE-FEATHER WAR BONNETS
AND REPATRIATING THE ICON OF THE GREAT PLAINS

LEO KILLSBACK

DEDICATION
I dedicate this article to all the current Cheyenne Council of Forty-Four Chiefs, headmen of the warrior societies, and combat veterans, as well as modern tribal leaders, warriors, ceremonial practitioners, and tribal citizens who continue to use eagles in the traditional manner, thus ensuring the survival of the warrior ways.

In 2010 a war bonnet belonging to Oglala Lakota chief Fools Crow was repatriated to hereditary chief Mel Lone Hill of Batesland, South Dakota, which is located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Fools Crow’s war bonnet was of the original warrior types, made of immature golden eagle tail feathers, tipped with yellow-dyed plumage, with a double trail that extended beyond the wearer’s height. The headpiece is comprised of nearly 100 immature golden eagle tail feathers, likely to have been made from the tails of as many as ten golden eagles or three captured eagles. Chief Fools Crow was a prominent spiritual and traditional leader who earned international notoriety after the Wounded Knee incident of 1973, and was prominent in efforts to introduce American Indian issues to the United Nations. In 1982 he, along with a coalition of Cheyenne and Lakota ceremonial leaders, brought the suit against the State of South Dakota in Fools Crow et al. v. Gullet et al. for American Indian religious freedom rights to practice ceremonies undisturbed at Nóvávé (Bear Butte).1

Fools Crow died in 1989. In 1953 he had gifted his headdress to then Nebraska governor Robert Crosby, who kept the item. After Crosby died in 2000, his wife began the repatriation process and eventually returned the war bonnet with the collaboration of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the

Key Words: Cheyenne, chiefs, customary law, headdress, Lakota, leadership, warrior

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Lakota nations. I provide detailed accounts to explain a new understanding of Plains Indian culture that may have been unknown, ignored, or misunderstood by scholars, historians, and other people who appreciate Plains Indian history and culture. I provide information that can and should be used in identifying war bonnets for eventual return or repatriation. Like all property, war bonnets should be returned to their rightful owners, but this should be done with respect, in humility, but deliberately, especially when demanded.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) cannot be ignored when identifying war bonnets because some institutions protect their holdings against repatriation when they deem objects as unidentifiable, branded as “gifts,” or not identified as objects eligible under NAGPRA. Unfortunately, there are federally funded museums, repositories, and institutions that have resisted NAGPRA in bitter opposition, as in the extreme case of Bonnichsen v. United States, popularly known as the case involving the Kennewick man, known to Indians as the “the ancient one.” Federally funded agencies are required to take an inventory of their holdings in consultation with tribes for eventual repatriation, but some items are missed. The law was created, among other purposes, to circumvent the illegal trafficking of American Indian cultural items and human remains. A significant population of the scientific community has perceived the law as a threat to the study of humankind and a threat to the holdings on display in museums. In other words, the Kennewick man controversy can influence the potential repatriation of items that are critical to the survival of American Indian cultures, such as headdresses and other regalia that may not be human remains. Nonetheless, and despite the major flaws of NAGPRA, Indian nations have been successful in repatriating human remains and burial items, because tribes have made doing so their priority.

I do not need to state the obvious fact that NAGPRA is controversial. Nonetheless, I strongly believe that engaging in existing or instigating new controversies will defeat our missions as scholars to provide honest and direct discussions...
about American Indian material culture. In this article, I provide accurate information about items of cultural patrimony in order to educate, inspire, and bridge gaps that continue to persist because of the lack of—or failure to listen to—the “Indian voice.” My intent is not to shame private collectors, museums, and other repositories into the return of material culture belonging to American Indians. Instead, I hope to initiate a new dialogue from which cultural items can be returned, balance restored, and spirits renewed and inspired by tribal customs of honor.

I begin this dialogue by deconstructing major stereotypes associated with war bonnets and then share the origin of these headpieces, followed by a history of war bonnets in tribal customs, warfare, and ceremony. I have divided this article into five parts, chronicling the significance of war bonnets in leadership, their origins, their worth in intertribal warfare and in wars against whites, and their use during the reservation era. Finally, I reveal how the reservation lifestyle changed tribal customs of war, emphasizing adaptations to these crowns.

WAR BONNETS AND LEADERSHIP

Throughout history, non-Indians have stereotypically associated war bonnets with official positions of leadership. However, few Cheyenne chiefs have been known to wear the headpiece before, during, and after the dramatic Plains Indian wars. Traditionally, mámaaéstse (war bonnets) were worn exclusively by warriors, not chiefs, and were worn only when going to war against worthy adversaries or in ceremony. In short, war bonnets were crowns to die in, not crowns of status. Much like wearers of scalp shirts, wearers of war bonnets invested a high degree of spirituality to their headdress, more so than the aesthetic value of the headdress. As Kåhamåxéveóhtáhe (Wooden Leg) recalled, much more was demanded of war bonnet wearers:

It was expected that one should be a student of the fighting art for several years, or else that he be an unusually apt leader, before he should put on the crown of eagle feathers. He then did so upon his own initiative, or perhaps because of the commendatory urgings of his seniors. The act meant a profession of fully acquired ability in warfare, a claim of special accomplishment in using cunning and common sense and cool calculation coupled with the bravery attributed to all warriors. The wearer was supposed never to ask [for] mercy in battle.

Kåhamåxéveóhtáhe did not wear a war bonnet until he was thirty-three years old, which was well after the Plains Indian wars, when he would have offered evidence of the high standards that seniors demanded of wearers.

Numerous accounts in Cheyenne and Lakota oral tradition reveal how warriors prepared before battles with enemy tribes and eventually with invading U.S. forces. Most, if not all, wearers were not chiefs in the political leadership sense. Unfortunately, the stereotype that merged chieftainship with war bonnet wearers had led to much confusion among white people, especially when the U.S. government was searching for a single spokesperson to make decisions for an entire tribe during treaty making. The fact that not one person, regardless of his personal attire, was in such a position of power often led to disputes.

An example of such disputes occurred after the infamous Sand Creek Massacre, when numerous skirmishes between U.S. troops, white
settlers, and warriors from the Cheyenne and Lakota nations only led to more tension in the Plains. In 1865 the United States initiated a full-scale war effort to subdue so-called hostile tribes. The Powder River expedition, led under Generals Dodge, Sully, and Connor, was sent out to attack Indian villages. Colonels Cole and Walker were ordered by General Connor to kill all Indian males over the age of twelve. I doubt they were careful enough to make certain of the age and sex of Indian children before shooting them down. Nonetheless, while the generals were successful in capturing Indian villages, Cole and Walker proved incompetent as leaders, in one instance losing a hundred horses to starvation. The colonels engaged in quite a fight against Cheyenne and Lakota warriors under the leadership of a courageous war bonnet wearer.9

Vóhko’xénéhe (Roman Nose) had requested that the leaders of the fight wait before attacking Cole and Walker’s brigades. Upon completion of war ceremonies, including preparing his war bonnet, Vóhko’xénéhe arrived at the fight and placed himself in front of the warriors. He then rode the length of the soldiers’ line within firing range. He rode along the soldiers’ line several times and was not hit. The warriors were thus inspired to defeat the white soldiers, who were eventually abandoned by the Cheyenne and Lakota. Cole and Walker tried to conceal their defeat, but the Cheyenne and Lakota remember how the soldiers were shamed in what is known as Roman Nose’s Fight.10 Vóhkoxénéhe showed his prowess as a war bonnet wearer but also earned a reputation as a chief, even though he was not of such high ranking.

Two years later, in 1867, General Winfield S. Hancock demanded that Vóhkoxénéhe, along with other Cheyenne chiefs and headmen, meet with U.S. officials. Unfortunately, Vóhkoxénéhe was of neither rank. He made appearance by orders of the chiefs in order to prevent another disaster of Sand Creek proportions. When Vóhkoxénéhe arrived, Hancock was disrespectful and arrogant, complaining of his tardiness. Hancock, like most whites, mistakenly believed Vóhkoxénéhe was a head chief. Nonetheless, Vóhkoxénéhe maintained composure. Though he was not a chief, he was able to maintain discipline as chiefs do in such heated situations.11

In another example, a young Lakota warrior was killed because of the mistakes of U.S. Army officials. In 1877 Colonel Nelson A. Miles was campaigning in the Tongue River valley in an effort to subdue the Cheyenne and Lakota bands involved in the Battle of the Little Big Horn a year earlier. The Mni Owoju (Planters by the Water) band of Lakota, like other tribes, were rich in material wealth, possessed huge reserves of meat and hides, and were dressed in their best clothing and beaded finery during this time, their last free days in their homeland. As Lame Deer stated, “[T]hey were enjoying their last vacation from the whiteman.”12 Unfortunately, the Lakota village was cornered, and Miles parleyed to negotiate the surrender of Chief Lame Deer and approximately fifty lodges of Lakota men, women, and children. Chief Lame Deer’s son, Flying, wore a trailing war bonnet. After the talks became heated, a soldier shot Flying in the head, killing him instantly, and moments later Chief Lame Deer and Iron Star were shot and killed. Soon the soldiers drove the people to the hills and began ransacking the village before they burned all fifty lodges to the ground.13 Thirty Lakota died that day, and some of their cultural items are on display at Range Riders Museum in Miles City, Montana, including a magnificent trailing war bonnet. These are only a few items of what remain of the splendor of the Mni Owoju, as the rest may have been sold and traded around the world.

When the Cheyenne and Lakota and other nations began fighting white adversaries, who knew little of Plains Indian warrior codes, warriors would seldom don their feathered headgear, as they knew they would be mistaken for leaders and draw more attention and fire than desired. Unaware of Plains Indian war customs of honor and courage, white military leaders commonly assumed that war bonnet wearers were of high political status, which often led them to poor decisions, sometimes the killing of innocent women and children. Even in the modern context, non-Indians have associated war bonnets with political leadership, which is probably why collectors and museums value these symbolic items. To avoid making the same false assumptions about
war bonnets and war bonnet wearers, we must gain a better understanding of the Plains Indian warrior ways. Furthermore, we must understand the use of war bonnets in the context of intertribal warfare, as sacred and ceremonial objects, and as funerary objects or items of cultural patrimony, worthy of repatriation.

THE FIRST WAR BONNETS

Each tribe may have different stories that tell of the first war bonnets. For the Cheyenne, there is one particular story of a young man who killed a mythic water serpent described as a large lizard or dragon-like beast called a méhne. This beast also appears in Lakota oral tradition as untktgila, whose bones can be found in the badlands. The animal appears throughout Cheyenne oral traditions and in actual events as a giant two-horned snake that is partially covered with hair. Despite the menacing appearance of the méhne, the Cheyenne revered its spiritual above its physical power. People would often pray and leave sacrifices to the animal at large bodies of water, especially near springs. This tradition continues today.

In oral tradition, the death or killing of a méhne was always associated with thunder and lighting. The beast became known as a “thunder being,” which are of spiritual significance among the Hohnóhka (contrary warriors). In one oral tradition, told by Mo’óhtáenáhkohe (Black Bear), a poor young man, who was very homely, could not win the attention of girls, but he killed a méhne:

When the camp was moving, a huge dragon appeared and blocked the people’s way. Three men charged the dragon; each, in turn, was slain. Then the homely youth tried his luck. He rode up to the dragon’s neck and cut off its head. The head fell like a thunderbolt. The young man then removed the dragon’s horns and made them into a hat. From them on people began to honor him. The girls who had once taunted him now begged for his attention. But he reminded them of their past cruelty and had nothing to do with any of them.

The horned, featherless hat was the first war bonnet for the Cheyenne people, and it became a significant part of Cheyenne culture, as it resembled the covenant Ésevone (Medicine Buffalo Hat). Tomósévêséh (Erect Horns), a prophet of the Só’taa’e (People Left Behind or Buffalo People), brought the covenant into existence, which gave its wearer the power over buffalo, as well as ensured safe and successful tribal hunts. Ésevone remains significant to the continuance of the Hestósanestôtse (sun dance ceremony). Later generations of Cheyenne, who traced their lineage to the Só’taa’e, made similar hats of fur from the hump and horns of buffalo bulls.

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Hotó’a’óxháa’staste (Tall Bull), the prominent Southern Cheyenne chief, had a unique trailing war bonnet made entirely of buffalo horns. Two horns were placed in the front, and it had a single trail of ten horns down the back. As time progressed, Só’taa’e warriors added primary eagle wing feathers, which encircled their medicine hats. Eagle feathers—as well as hawk, raven, crow, owl, and magpie feathers—possessed...
the power of war and the fighting spirit.19 These horned bonnets were tipped with white plumes, billowed out to nearly three feet, and trails of feathers were added to give the wearer the appearance of the horned méhne.20 The Hohnóhka were known to wear this hotóame’ko (bullhead) style of war bonnet in ceremony and in battle, but these horned headdresses became popular throughout the Great Plains.21 Among the unique war bonnets of the Cheyenne were the headdresses belonging to the original warrior societies.

The Tsétsehéstâhese (People Like Us or Like-Hearted People) band of Cheyenne had a culture hero whose name was Motsé’eöeve (Sweet Root Standing). Motsé’eöeve is credited and honored for bringing about, among other things, the five original warrior societies. These societies were unique in custom, ceremony, and dress, but they were all part of the governing system of the Cheyenne Nation and were equally responsible for protecting the lives and land of future generations. The Ma’e’ehoohevase (Red Shield Warriors or Buffalo Men) wore traditional hotóame’ko-style hats without feathers.22 The Hémo’eoxeo’o (Elk Warriors or Crooked Lance Men) also wore hotóame’ko hats, but they were comprised of eagle feathers. Hémo’eoxeo’o war bonnets differed from the Hohnóhka style, as they strung only a single row of eagle feathers from their head, down their back, to their feet. This row could have been comprised entirely of either primary wing or tail feathers from golden eagles, which enhanced a wearer’s menacing appearance.23

The Hotamétaneo’o (Dog Warriors or Dog Men) wore unique war bonnets made of numerous raven or crow feathers, which remained upright, pointing every which way. The black raven feathers were tipped with plumage from smaller birds, later with red down feathers. These war bonnets, or feather hats, had a single row of black and white golden eagle tail feathers that went from the top of the head down toward the back of the wearer. During the wars with the whites, members of the Hotamétaneo’o adapted their war bonnets from the original raven-feather hats, to a unique style comprised of encircled eagle feathers that stood upright.24 The upright style was specially made for adding one or two trails at later times; only the best of warriors could have hoped to gain such honors.25 The upright style had been commonly associated with the Blackfeet, Blackfoot, and Siksika peoples of the northwestern Plains.26 Nevertheless, the Hotamétaneo’o had become popular for wearing semi-halo-shaped war bonnets that were not as cylindrical as Blackfeet crowns. The Hotamétaneo’o had gained a reputation in the Southern Plains wars and were known for their fierceness, selflessness, virtue, and sacrificial service to their people. Ma’exomoo’e (Red Lance), Náhkôhevotonevêstse (Bear Feathers), and Náhkôxháaestse (Brave Bear) are depicted in battle donning their upright-style war bonnets in the Dog Soldier Ledger book.27 All three Southern Cheyenne warriors were prominent leaders in the 1860s.

Another warrior society, not one of the original ones brought by the prophet Motsé’eöeve, was the Hotamémåsehao’o (Crazy Dog Warriors...
or Crazy Dogs). Members of this society wore a unique horned-style war bonnet made with the antlers from pronghorn antelope. Society members made these war bonnets with a single row of golden eagle feathers strung down the back of the wearer. They also decorated the headdress with owl feathers. While wearing these crowns, members of the Hotamémášéhao’ó were instilled with the speed and strength of the antelope.

The original warrior society war bonnets were created to symbolize unity and loyalty among fellow warriors. Though a warrior society shared a style of dress, they did not distinguish among themselves a high or low economic status of Cheyenne man. Those who wore war bonnets in this original manner were not considered royalty among their people. In Europe, monarchs wore crowns of gold and jewels, and non-Indians have attributed such customs to Indians and their crowns. Perhaps this assumption is another reason why non-Indian collectors possess eagle feather headdresses. Unfortunately for such collectors, society war bonnets like those I have described are community property and belong not to individuals but to the societies to which individuals belong. These headpieces were used in ceremonial practices related to war preparation, war and scalp dances, and sacred parades.

WARRIORS AND INTERTRIBAL WARFARE

Before going to war, the Véhoo’ó (Cheyenne Council of Forty-Four Chiefs) deliberated on plans of action against potential adversaries. Once a plan of action was decided, they chose four individual warriors, based upon their skill and service, to lead the offensive. Warriors were honored to assume such a responsibility, and their respective society members ceremonially painted the warriors and their horses upon selection. The chosen warriors were led in a ceremonial parade around the camp circle, while their society followed directly behind. Other societies followed as well. In each, every warrior was dressed in his best war clothes, exhibiting the ceremonial dress of his society, including its unique style of war bonnets. As the parade progressed, warriors sang the war songs of their brotherhoods. This grand ceremony united the people in the war effort, but it was also the appropriate protocol for declaring war on a group that threatened the Cheyenne people.

The ancient Cheyenne war customs, such as the parade, were practiced in a sacred manner, since warfare was especially respected as an act to be done in balance. When done in haste, the results could be disastrous, as was the case in 1837 when an entire party of Hema’tanônéhêö (Bow String Warriors) was annihilated by a coalition of Comanche and Kiowa. The following year the Véhoo’ó selected the Ma’êhoohevase warriors to lead the war against the Comanche-Kiowa camp. The warriors prepared for war as dictated by custom, wearing their war clothes and unique war
In the subsequent battle, the Cheyenne inflicted a major blow to the Comanche-Kiowa group, which eventually led to a peace agreement between the three tribes.32

Intertribal warfare customs also allowed for individual warriors to gain war honors outside their respective societies and to be recognized by the entire nation. Should a warrior choose to pursue such distinguished recognition, through counting coup or showing courage, he sought the help of spiritual leaders. Spiritual advisers made war bonnets for these particular warriors, which remained a common practice until Plains Indians were forced onto reservations. Once a young warrior made such a request, a spiritual leader or veteran warriors gathered the necessary materials to make a headpiece that met a young warrior’s needs. “War medicine” could help a warrior attain courage, as was the case of Vo’evähtoëšëstse (Alights On The Cloud or Touching Cloud), who wore an iron shirt of chainmail. Vo’evähtoëšëstse had taken his war medicine seriously, and in 1844 was able to make his enemies, a group of Delaware hunters, “empty their guns” (shoot until they ran out of ammunition).33 Warriors also gained such prowess with their war bonnets.

Throughout the 1800s, war bonnets were conceived from dreams or visions and made for those seeking protection or personal power, similar to charms, shields, or other articles of war clothing. From its inception in a warrior’s initial vision, to its final creation and use in warfare, the war bonnet was a covenant of personal power that could give a warrior the confidence to face a barrage of arrows or bullets or even provoke a warrior to charge an entire brigade of soldiers single-handedly. Spiritual leaders desired tail feathers of immature golden eagles, almost exclusively, for war bonnets. These black-tipped feathers, nearly fourteen inches in length, gave a war bonnet balance and a regal symmetrical composition. Depending on its wearer, the headdress was also decorated with feathers of smaller birds of prey like red-tailed hawks or prairie falcons. A warrior’s medicine may call for the skins or feathers of owls, woodpeckers, flickers, or a belted kingfisher so that a wearer could become elusive by emulating the quick and sometimes deadly movements of the smaller birds. Whether a vision called for elusiveness or bulletproof power, a warrior’s personal “medicine” determined how the headdress was to be created and worn. Warriors who participated in the sun dance ceremony placed a single eagle plume at the top of an extension, protruding upright from the center of the head, signifying their status attained from ceremony. Young warriors also tied beaded charms containing their umbilical cords, suggesting that the hat was a symbol of a man’s birth, life, and eventual death.34

War bonnet wearers were certainly prepared to die, which is why their hats were sacred. Death in intertribal warfare was considered an honor,
The young Luther responded: “This made my heart beat so loud I could hear it, and the tears came into my eyes; but I was willing to do my father’s bidding, as I wanted so much to please him.” Courage was among the most valued virtues for Plains Indians. Only worthy warriors could wear war bonnets, and they were to do so only under strict supervision and instruction.

A war bonnet and its medicine could save the life of a wearer, as in the case of Hevovetāso (Old Whirlwind). In 1854 the Cheyenne were involved in a major skirmish against a hunting party of nearly a hundred well-armed Sac and Foxes. Hevovetāso was nearly killed, and he credited his survival to his war bonnet, which had nearly all its feathers shot out, except for a stuffed hawk, which remained completely untouched. A similar case occurred at the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, where Náhkôxháahketa (Little Bear) survived the attack. He recalled:

They chased me up the creek for about two miles, very close behind me and firing on me all the time. Nearly all the feathers were shot out of my war bonnet, and some balls passed through my shield; but I was not touched. I passed many women and children, dead and dying, lying in the creek bed. The soldiers had not scalped them yet, as they were busy chasing those that were yet alive.

Spiritual leaders continued to make war medicines, such as those of Náhkôxháahketa and Hevovetāso, to protect warriors throughout intertribal wars and against the invading whites. When a warrior was killed, these medicines died with him and were thus left at his grave.

Traditional burial customs among the Lakota and Cheyenne differed in some respects. Both tribes, however, believed that warriors who died in battle should be honored and remembered as part of the land. Their bodies were to become part of the earth, and hence, the places where great warriors had completed phenomenal acts of courage were memorialized. Upon death, Lakota warriors were customarily placed high upon scaffolds or in trees, and his property and war implements were placed with him. When Cheyenne warriors died, however, they were wrapped in a
buffalo robe and covered with rocks on the side of a hill. Some warriors were buried in elaborate ceremonies and placed along with all their property in a ceremonial burial lodge, as was the custom for burying civilians. No grave was dug deep into the ground; the belief was that warriors' bodies, along with their possessions, should be allowed to slowly return back to the earth.

Cheyenne warriors believed that if they died in a great battle, their bodies should be covered with only a robe, for it was an honor to have their flesh eaten by eagles, wolves, and other animals of great power, and their bodies scattered throughout the land. If a Cheyenne warrior was killed wearing a war shirt or war bonnet, he was to remain untouched, as it was equally an honor to be killed by an enemy of great power and to allow that enemy to look upon the slain body. Cheyenne warriors left the bodies of their fallen comrades so enemies could see the finely dressed warrior. Other Plains Indian tribes respected these customs, but whites are still unable to grasp or appreciate such ways. For example, Vo‘éváhtóéšéstses fellow Cheyenne warriors left his dead body, along with other fallen comrades, in this manner after Pawnees killed them in 1852.

When Cheyenne and Lakota warriors fought and died together, sometimes Lakota culture influenced Cheyenne burial practices and vice versa. Thus the Cheyenne’s use of scaffolds became common, especially in wars against whites. In both Cheyenne and Lakota cultures, a dead warrior was dressed in his finest clothing and placed at rest with his property—including his guns, bow and arrows, knives, pipe and tobacco, spear and shield—and his finest horse was shot near his grave. Upon the death of a war bonnet wearer, if his body was recovered by his companions, his personal headpiece was placed with him at the gravesite, and it therefore became an associated funerary object. Regardless of the burial practice, the life of a war bonnet ended with the life of its wearer in battle, and both were left to physically return to the earth in a slow but natural manner. Warriors did not fear death but embraced the inevitable.

In the event that a warrior who owned a war bonnet was killed when not wearing it or outside of battle, he would undergo the same burial ceremony as other warriors, but his respective warrior society would assume ownership of his war bonnet and any other war-related items. War items were inherited through the warrior society, likely to a family member of the fallen. War bonnets used in warrior society ceremonies are objects of cultural patrimony. These precontact customary laws were followed throughout intertribal wars and wars with whites, and such laws should apply when considering modern efforts to repatriate. Some war bonnets did not fall into the above-mentioned categories; they were not associated with the death of a warrior, neither were...
they hereditary, nor affiliated with any warrior society. Modern collectors and museums may not know the lineage of such items and therefore may not know if the rules of NAGPRA would apply to them. In any case, we know that spiritual leaders never made war bonnets as “gifts” or for non-Indians, because war bonnets were always made for an individual Indian to honor his death on the battlefield or for other ceremonial purposes.

WAR BONNETS AND WARS AGAINST WHITES

Cheyenne warriors carried on their old warrior ways against white soldiers, and the customs of war medicine continued whether or not enemies honored the cultures of Plains Indian. Má’ome (Ice aka Hotoa’ôhvo’komaestse or White Bull) was a prominent spiritual leader who was known to have, among other skills, powerful war medicine. In the spring of 1857 Colonel E. V. Sumner pursued the Cheyenne, and Má’ome thus conducted a number of ceremonies that would render the soldier bullets useless. Sumner had found out about the power of Má’ome, and departed Fort Leavenworth heavily armed with rifles, pistols, and extra ammunition. When Sumner met the Cheyenne warriors, he ordered his troops to charge with their sabers in order to bypass the power of Má’ome. The warriors were panic-stricken and fled; nine warriors were killed in the battle, the extraordinary and only account of a U.S. officer using Cheyenne war medicine in his favor.48

Nevertheless, war customs did not change when warriors went to battle against white soldiers, as they prepared, dressed, and underwent the same ceremonies as they did during intertribal wars. In 1865 the Véhoo’o selected the Hotamémâseha’o to lead against the invading U.S. soldiers. As a group, the entire society made preparations for battle and conducted elaborate ceremonies as they dressed for war. “All these ceremonies and the prayers made were supplications for protection and success in the fight that was to come.”49

As individuals, war bonnet wearers were also expected to maintain the same degree of self-discipline when facing white soldiers as when facing other Indians. For example, before the Fetterman fight in 1866, the famous Cheyenne chief Ö’kõhômõxhâhketa (Little Wolf) gave his war clothes to his brother Á’eé’ese (Big Nose), who in turn fought courageously. Warriors like Ö’kõhômõxhâhketa who were honorable in such warrior etiquette eventually earned respect and were selected as a council chief. Wearers were demanded by custom to uphold their responsibilities not only as war leaders but also as spiritual leaders, since a wearer had personal ceremonial responsibilities to his hat. Warriors simply did not place these sacred objects upon their heads as they pleased; they had maintained spiritual discipline long before a fight. If a warrior went into battle “without his war bonnet in perfect condition, he would be sure to be killed by the enemy.”50 Northern Cheyenne historian John Stands In Timber describes a preparation process moments before entering into a fight:

FIG. 8. Pre-reservation (1850–1880) halo-style Northern Cheyenne war bonnet, decorated with subadult and mature golden eagle tail feathers. Cheyenne Indian Museum, Ashland, MT. Photograph by author.
They had to go through ceremonies with whatever they had. Some old men had come along to instruct their sons or grandsons or nephews in these things before they attacked. Those with warbonnets smoothed the ground and marked it. Then each man would pick up his warbonnet after signing special songs and raise toward the sunrise, bringing it down toward his head. He would stop three times and the fourth time put it on, while his instructor kept on singing.\footnote{51}

Should a warrior fail to maintain spiritual discipline and violate any sacred laws, he could be met with dire consequences, as was the case of Vóhko’xénéhe.

Vóhko’xénéhe (Roman Nose) wore a unique single-horned war bonnet, a style known to the Cheyenne as a nonómahévóhkhé’a (thunder hat). Only the bravest of warriors could possess such a sacred hat, as it was considered the holiest of war bonnets. Má’ome, the famous medicine man, made this war bonnet for Vóhko’xénéhe after he survived a violent thunder and hailstorm on a vision quest.\footnote{52} After four days, Má’ome fashioned the sacred headpiece.

This war bonnet was the only one of its kind ever made. When a boy, Roman Nose fasted for four days on an island in a lake in Montana, and in his dreams saw a serpent with a single horn in its head. This was the reason White Bull came to make this peculiar war bonnet. Instead of having two buffalo horns attached to the head-band, one on each side, it had but one, rising over the center of the forehead; it had a very long tail that nearly touched the ground even when Roman Nose was mounted. This tail was made of a strip of young buffalo bull’s hide, and had eagle feathers set along its length, first four red feathers then four black ones, then four red feathers again, and so on, forty feathers in all. In making this famous war bonnet, White Bull did not use anything that had come from the whites: no cloth, thread, or metal.\footnote{53}

The skin of a kingfisher was tied behind the single horn, and then the skin of a hawk was tied on the right side of the head. Next, the skin of a barn swallow was tied to the back of the head, and finally, the skin of a bat was tied halfway to the bottom.\footnote{54} The bright blue barn swallow was an elusive bird, and the bat was elusive at night. All animals had spiritual significance to the warrior’s medicine. Vóhko’xénéhe had to conduct an elaborate ceremony to crown himself, as described by George Bent:

Usually war bonnets required little medicine-making when going into battle, but Roman Nose’s bonnet was very sacred and required much ceremony. In taking it out of its hide case, it was held over a live coal on which was sprinkled a pinch of powder from a medicine root; then the bonnet was raised toward the sun four times, next unwrapped from its covering and held up to the north, west, south, and east, after which Roman Nose carefully put it on his head.\footnote{55}

Má’ome instructed Vóhko’xénéhe how to paint his face when wearing the nonómahévóhkhé’a, and also told of the sacred laws of possessing such an item. If he wanted the medicine of the war bonnet to work, Vóhko’xénéhe could not enter a lodge where a baby was born until four days after, could not eat certain foods, and most importantly, could not eat from food that had been touched by metal.\footnote{56} If the laws were violated, both Vóhko’xénéhe and his nonómahévóhkhé’a had to undergo a purification process, conducted by the wearer himself, before reactivating the war medicine ordained by Má’ome. Following these ways, Vóhko’xénéhe was successful in numerous battles, but unfortunately, his medicine was finally breached.\footnote{57}

After the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, peace was secured and the U.S. Army closed the Bozeman Trail and abandoned Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith. But the peace did not last long because a number of Cheyenne bands protested the treaty and never consented to its demands. Major George A. Forsyth was looking to subdue the Hotamétane’o’o, who refused to sign the treaty because they wished to remain free from white treaties and laws. Forsyth and his soldiers found themselves trapped on a natural earth island, Beecher Island. Vóhko’xénéhe rushed to the
fight because several Indians were being killed. Unfortunately, a woman who prepared his morn-
ing meal served him food with a metal object, thus breaking a law of the nonómahévéhókhé’á’e. Nonetheless, Vóhko’xénéhe deferred the purifi-
cation ceremony, proclaiming: “If I go into this fight, I shall certainly be killed. I know I will be
killed today.”58 Vóhko’xénéhe put on his war bon-
net and rode into battle; he joined other warriors and thus exposed himself to fire from the white
soldiers. After successfully riding past the soldiers
on the island, who missed after firing several vol-
leys, he went for a second pass and was hit by
some soldiers who had hidden themselves near
the river. Vóhko’xénéhe fell and was rescued by
his fellow warriors; moments later he died.59 The
great warrior was laid to rest in his war clothes, in
Lakota style, on a scaffold.60

Peter J. Powell had asserted that the single pro-
truding horn of a nonómahévéhókhé’á’e was the
symbol of hetanéhao (“man power”), which was
the power embodied in a man’s ability to procre-
ate.61 This is false, as the single horn was part of
the entire arrangement of the thunder hat and
could not be distinguished as a lone symbol.62 The
nonómahévéhókhé’á’e was gifted to Vóhko’xénéhe
in a dream in which he witnessed the power of
the mèhne or possibly that of the âxe, a single-
horned mythical creature in Cheyenne oral tradi-
tion that lived underwater but walked about on
land, and whose bones were probably from Tric-
eratops.63 The nonómahévéhókhé’á’e was to give its
wearer the appearance, strength, and courage of a
supernatural being and was so rare that only four
have been known to exist.64

The most common type of war bonnet in the
Great Plains was the conical-shaped, halo-spread-
style headdress, which billowed out behind the
wearer’s head.65 These ancient war bonnets did
not originate with the Cheyenne but were quick-
ly adopted from the Lakota, who invented the
style.66 Before the wars with whites the Cheyenne
and Lakota were never in a perpetual state of war,
as much of Plains Indian life was peaceful. During
the down part of the day, men engaged in making
essential items for survival on the rugged plains,
including rope, saddles, and tack. Luther Stand-
ing Bear recalled: “Some made hunting arrows,
while others made shields and war-bonnets.”67

Men took pride in their appearance, especially
those who belonged to warrior societies, as they
were often engaged in social dancing, parades,
and other forms of entertainment. Standing Bear
described it:

If it is true that people “love fine clothes be-
cause they love fine manners,” then the de-
scription is fittingly applied to the Lakotas,
for they had a great fondness for decorating
clothing. The long trails of beautiful feath-
er, the flaring headdress, deep fringe, and
leather tassels were indicative of much atten-
tion to appearance, and certainly one could
not well carry a regal headdress and trail with-
out attention to posture and poise, while the
significance given to articles of ceremonial
decoration indicates the love of ceremony and
dignity.68

The eagle-feather war bonnet was the most sig-
nificant piece of regalia in Lakota tradition, as it
added attraction to a warrior. Lakota chiefs wore
the halo or “swept-back” style, but other hunters
and warriors could wear the garments, regardless
of its value as war medicine or its protective pow-
ers.69 The same laws applied to Cheyenne wear-
ers of this style of headdress. Warriors were to
be always prepared to dress “for battle or for so-
cial mingling,” which is why they kept their war
bundles, containing all their sacred objects in-
cluding their war bonnet, within close reach.70 It
is difficult to determine for certainty which halo
war bonnets were sacred, ceremonial, or social.71
Whatever the case, for both cultures the war bon-
nets were either the family property of male fami-
ly members, or the cultural property of a wearer’s
respective warrior societies.

The feathers of halo war bonnets encircled the
head and met in the back, but some were made
so that either a single or double row of feathers
could be added to the trail.72 At the Battle of the
Rosebud on June 17, 1876, numerous Cheyenne
and Lakota warriors wore trailing war bonnets. In
some headdresses, a double-trailing war bonnet
was a continuous row of feathers, such as the hat
worn by White Bull, the nephew of Sitting Bull:
come great. If you should be killed, the enemy when they go back will say that they fought a man who was very brave; that they had a hard time to kill him.77

Vóhpo’hóahno was among the first to arrive at the battle, where he met a Crow scout who also wore a war bonnet. Vóhpo’hóahno killed the Crow and counted coup on another Crow wearing a war bonnet. Shortly afterward he killed a white soldier. He was fierce and able to lead several charges; in one he killed another white soldier, an officer, in close combat and captured his six-shooter. At a distance, Vóhpo’hóahno saw that Éše’he Ôhnêsêñê (Two Moon) was trapped and about to be overtaken by soldiers. Vóhpo’hóahno rode to assist his fellow warrior, and upon arrival was able to knock out a shell that had jammed in his gun; both men eventually escaped together under the protection of the war bonnet medicine.78

Another Cheyenne named Vóhpohmo’éhe (White Elk), a Cheyenne, was a war bonnet wearer at the same battle. He inherited the medicine bundle of his uncle, Mo›kêsta›eaenoh (Young Black Hawk), on site. The brow of the hat was painted with butterfly and dragonfly designs. It also had a number of large eagle plumes that were tied down the length of the trail, each about six inches apart. Vóhpohmo’éhe tied the skin of a barn swallow to his uncle’s trailing bonnet; the swallow’s power would help him elude pursuing enemies. War bonnet wearers remained disciplined in a fight, since enemies would challenge their prowess. Kåhamåxéveóhtáhe recalled such an act at the Battle of the Rosebud:

Jack Red Cloud, son of the old Ogallala Chief Red Cloud, was wearing a warbonnet. His horse was killed. According to the Indian way, in such cases the warrior was supposed to stop and take off the bridle from the killed horse, to show how cool he could conduct himself. But young Red Cloud forgot to do this. He went running as soon as his horse fell. Three Crows on horseback followed him, lashed him with their pony whips and jerked off and kept his warbonnet. They did not try to kill him. They only teased him, telling him he was a
A war bonnet wearer had much at stake when wearing a sacred crown in battle. He could earn the respect of his peers and die an honorable death, or face ridicule and dishonor, even from enemies.

At the Battle of the Rosebud, several of the bravest Cheyenne warriors exposed themselves to fire from the white soldiers in the custom of “emptying their guns” or by “playing with them.” In one dramatic instance, a war bonnet wearer named Véhonemééñééstse (Chief Appearing or Chief Comes In Sight) exposed himself to enemy fire. A soldier shot Véhoneméëñééstse’s horse and he fell, but he landed on his feet and ran because he had no cover. His sister, Ésevoneméónâ (Buffalo Calf Road Woman), witnessed the events unfold but did not hesitate to ride out and rescue her brother amidst heavy fire. The Cheyenne remember this battle as “where the girl saved her brother.”

A week after the Battle of the Rosebud, the Cheyenne and Lakota would have another encounter with white soldiers at the Little Bighorn. In this battle, the soldiers were ill-prepared, as warriors yelled and mocked: “You are only boys. You ought not to be fighting. We whipped you on the Rosebud. You should have brought more Crows or Shoshones with you to do your fighting.” Vékêséhésé (Little Bird) wore a long trailing war bonnet; he and Kâhâmáxévééohéhú (Wooden Leg) lashed a soldier who seemed too pitiful to kill right off. After the soldier shot and wounded Vékêséhésé, Kâhâmáxévééohéhú knocked the soldier off his horse and seized his rifle. Kâhâmáxévééohéhú identified twelve Cheyenne warriors who wore war bonnets; three were society headmen and ten of the war bonnets had trails. Hémékône Öhmåsêhéáhseeéstse (Crazy Head) was a council chief who wore his head-dress but did not directly engage in any fighting. Ésehénâhkohe (Sun Bear) wore a sacred single-horned thunder hat. The Cheyenne and Lakota were victorious as Lt. Col. George A. Custer and his entire brigade were annihilated one week before the one hundredth birthday of the United States. The victory was short-lived, however, as the war of 1876 would prove to be a series of conflicts that would inevitably lead to the end of the ancient Cheyenne ways of war.

On July 17, 1876, Buffalo Bill Cody and the Fifth Calvary under the command of Colonel Wesley Merritt ambushed a group of Northern Cheyenne. The small skirmish, called the Battle of Warbonnet Creek, was popularized after Buffalo Bill boasted of his duel with a Cheyenne, Heóvoma’e (Yellow Head). Evidently the Cheyenne did not first “play” with the soldiers, as a barrage of bullets from the troops killed Heóvoma’e, who was wearing a war bonnet. Nonetheless, Buffalo Bill scalped him and took credit for the kill, then stole a number of items including a rifle, knife, and other war implements. Buffalo Bill later exhibited the belongings of Heóvoma’e as trophies, especially his scalp and war bonnet. Heóvoma’e was the only casualty in the fray.

On November 25, 1876, three months after the Battle of the Little Bighorn, General Ranald S. Mackenzie attacked the largest encampment of Northern Cheyenne. In the panic of the battle, a few Cheyenne warriors were able to properly dress for battle and activate their war medicine. Ókohke Ó’xeveeséhe (Crow Split Nose), headman of the Hémo’eoxeo’o, successfully moved women and children to cover under the protection of his trailing war bonnet. Ókohkevo’oa (Crow Necklace) and Éše’he Ôhnéšese stse (Two Moon) both wore trailing war bonnets and rode in the open fire to draw attention away from civilians. Unfortunately, Ókohkevo’oa was shot and killed directly in front of Éše’he Ôhnéšeseséstse. In another valiant effort to repel the attacking U.S. soldiers, Heóveeséhe (Yellow Nose) rallied twenty warriors; all wore war bonnets and charged the soldier line, thus allowing several trapped warriors to escape to safety. One U.S. soldier was killed in the charge, prompting the line to retreat to another location. Nevertheless, the grand Northern Cheyenne village was captured, as in the Lame Deer battle. The conclu-
The last trailing war bonnet wearer to expose himself to open enemy fire was Ma’xe’hókohke (Big Crow). He did so in a battle that took place along the Tongue River in what is known to the Cheyenne as “where Big Crow walked.” On January 8, 1877, Colonel Miles set up a defense against a group of Cheyenne and Lakota warriors under the leadership of Crazy Horse. Ma’xe’hókohke had a gun from the spoils of the Custer fight and walked back and forth along a ridge under the protection of his war bonnet, facing the soldiers and firing until he ran out of bullets; he had to ask for ammo from his comrades so he could continue shooting. Though Ma’xe’hókohke was close to the soldiers, he was able to walk through the line of fire twice. The soldiers unleashed their rifles and fired shots from their howitzer cannons. On his third pass, Ma’xe’hókohke was hit. Two Lakota rescued the war bonnet wearer, but he couldn’t move and told his rescuers: “Just leave me here where there is shelter. I will die anyhow. Go on home.” The warriors returned later and buried him there, placing him in a buffalo robe and covering him with rocks according to custom. Two Lakota warriors were killed in this battle; Ma’xe’hókohke was the only Cheyenne death.

Eventually the last of the free bands of Cheyenne and Lakota surrendered and were placed on reservations. But the spiritual act of dressing for war continued even when Dull Knife’s Northern Cheyenne were imprisoned after their long trek from Indian Territory. War and death customs of the Cheyenne were not limited to warriors, as all Cheyenne were to die with honor and dignity, even in unfavorable circumstances and when confronting unworthy foes. Civilians were also burdened with this tradition of facing death with dignity. On January 9, 1879, only hours before the infamous Fort Robinson breakout, Hoänóhnésó (Little Shield) ordered all the prisoners—men, women, and children—to prepare for their deaths: “Now, dress up and put on your best clothing. We will all die together.” The people then broke out of imprisonment; thirty were killed, twenty-three were wounded, twelve were captured, and fourteen escaped in this desperate fight for freedom.

WAR BONNETS ON THE RESERVATION

Until the Northern Cheyenne won a reservation in 1884, they were known to be among the finest warriors and horsemen. But with the reservation lifestyle the old warrior ways began to slowly die. Through the Courts of Indian Offenses, the United States had enforced regulations that oppressed spiritual practices. Between 1884 and 1935 the Northern Cheyenne could not practice their traditions, wear ceremonial clothing, or conduct their ancient ceremonies. Those who fought in wars against the United States feared punishment from reservation agents, and those who defeated Custer were especially careful of what they said and with whom they spoke. When the federal government banned spiritual practices, reservation agents confiscated any ceremonial objects to their liking, including the original medicine war bonnets. Restrictions seemed rather contradictory, considering that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, which was quite successful from 1883 to 1917, depended on Indian actors to dress in their war finery for entertainment. Reservation life was harsh as the once-proud buffalo hunters became dependent on U.S. government handouts. But the Cheyenne warrior spirit was not going to die a silent death.

In 1890 two young men were charged for murdering a white settler’s son and the U.S. government sought to hang the boys. To keep their families from starving, twenty-five-year-old Vehoneme’ko (Head Chief) and fourteen-year-old Heä’ke (Young Mule) killed a beef belong-
ther, the famous medicine man Má’ome (Ice). Under vows of death, the two boys charged down the hill on horseback while the soldiers opened fire; Hea’ke fell on this initial charge and was shot and killed while hiding among the rocks. Vehoneme’ko passed through the line despite being hit several times. He returned halfway up the hill and charged a second time, but fell when an officer ran up and shot him in the head. A single feather fell from his war bonnet and was left untouched. The two boys were buried among the rocks in the customary manner; the war bonnet was tied to a rock for all the people to see until it was finally destroyed by the elements. This was the last time a Cheyenne warrior died in such a manner, signifying the end of the warrior ways.

The early reservation era (1884–1935) proved to have a dramatic effect on the spiritual and warrior tradition, and the use of war bonnets became obsolete. Cheyenne men could no longer engage in warfare, as did their fathers and grandfathers, so it seemed inevitable that the original military significance of war bonnets would diminish. At the same time that traditional ceremonies were banned, a lucrative market for eagle-feather war bonnets spread throughout the United States and Europe as non-Indian collectors and museums sought them. These crowns sold for as much as a thousand dollars, proving to be a seductive market for anyone during this time, especially for those living on the economically challenged reservation. In the 1920s one sold for $75,000. As an art form, the war bonnet was probably the most recognizable garment of the Plains Indians, hence the high demand for them. Because of this market, a significant proportion of what remained of material culture was lost during this early reservation era.

Long before the commercial powwow circuit came into being, tribes of the Northern Plains practiced underground dances and ceremonies, some of which required the use of war bonnets. Such dances allowed for Indians to remain Indian, despite pressures to assimilate and threats of imprisonment. As the warrior culture dissolved with the reservation, war and ceremonial dances adapted to social dances. These early reservation practices adapted to today’s glamor-
danced to several songs wearing their traditional-style dresses, decorated with elk teeth or cowry shells, and wore war bonnets provided by older male relatives and chiefs, blessing the headpieces with femininity.\textsuperscript{99} The War Bonnet Dance concluded the entire Kettle Dance ceremony, upon which new members of the women’s society were initiated and honored. Throughout the rest of the year, members would maintain their responsibilities. Whether the crafts were beadwork, sewing, or mentoring other young women, the society members served the nation. Unfortunately, the society slowly declined in the modern era as the burdens of reservation life and the influences of mainstream culture, Christianity, and pan-Indianism took their toll. Nevertheless, the Northern Cheyenne continued to use the war bonnet.

In the early to mid-1900s, towns like Sheridan, Wyoming, and Miles City, Montana, that neighbored the then Tongue River Indian Reservation held rodeos and other events, which were frequented by Cheyenne visitors.\textsuperscript{100} During parades and social gatherings, young Cheyenne men would fashion war bonnets for show and exhibition. Dancers would also display their art and talents at the powwow that coincided with the other festivities, which eventually adapted into modern powwows. The Northern Cheyenne took up these practices and also held rodeos and horse races where participants would parade and wear traditional regalia.

Through the later reservation era (1935–1960) the art of making war bonnets in the traditional manner deteriorated, as religious practices faded and as spiritual leaders could no longer acquire desired eagle feathers. Before they were confined to reservation boundaries, spiritual leaders ceremonially captured eagles from hilltop pits throughout the Plains. The birds were kept until they molted three times, upon which they were released. War bonnets were made almost exclusively of immature golden eagle tail feathers.\textsuperscript{101} A full bonnet required twenty-four to thirty-six feathers, and since an eagle has twelve feathers per tail, a full bonnet required two to three tails or two to three molts of a captured eagle. A double-trailing war bonnet could have been comprised of as many as 200 tail feathers. With the shrinkage

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**FIG. 10.** Early reservation (1880–1935) halo-style Northern Cheyenne war bonnet, decorated with mature golden eagle tail and secondary wing feathers. Montana State Historical Society, Helena, MT. Photograph by author.
gin but was gifted to the Apache chief before his death. A non-Indian attempted to sell it for $1.2 million but was arrested and charged with violating the Eagle Protection Act.105

Today the black market is still flooded with cultural objects, and repatriation nearly requires fully funded undercover operations to rescue these items.106 Indian tribes do not have the luxury of the funding and resources needed in their efforts to repatriate their sacred objects, and cultural resources are not a high priority for federal law enforcement agencies.107 Advocates of Indian cultural resources have greater concerns for the inconsistency in the laws that seem to protect non-Indian elites’ keeping war bonnets as decorations, while regulating Indians’ use of eagle feathers in ceremonies.108

In the modern era, the Cheyenne continue to use war bonnets made of real eagle feathers, but they are used exclusively by members of the Chiefs Society, warrior society headmen, and war veterans. Bonnets made of fake eagle feathers are used in parades and for show but never for ceremonial purposes, because the use of fake eagle feathers in ceremonies is considered an insult. Most tribal citizens maintain reverence for these sacred hats and believe that the aforementioned peoples are the only ones worthy of the associated responsibilities. Indian nations continue to reemerge and reestablish themselves in the images of their ancestors, and part of this movement is the return of lost cultural items. Citizens of Plains Indian nations are faced with three major cultural challenges in this movement: (1) they must maintain autonomy and their unique tribal identities among the ever-expanding pan-Indian cultural practices like the commercial powwow circuit; (2) they must follow the customs and traditional laws of their ancestors to remain true to their identities and not lose sight of the integrity and discipline associated with eagle feathers; (3) and they must prioritize in repatriating cultural property to enrich the lives of their citizens.

War bonnets are symbols of the Plains Indians, and more importantly, they are sacred objects that remind modern Indians of their ancient warrior ways. These magnificent headpieces tell of a time when our young men maintained a sacred life of discipline and honor; when men...
submitted to duty, loyalty, and sacrifice for the livelihood of their people, land, and future generations. Comprised of feathers from the most sacred bird in North America, made with humility and in reverence for the supernatural, war bonnets are more than mere decorative pieces of art from dead or dying cultures.

Collectors who were unworthy of the customs and standards of the warrior culture took war bonnets from Indian peoples, or bought them when Indian people were in dire need. Some war bonnets have been returned, but some are retained by those who may have little or no understanding of Indian burial rights, warrior ways, and concepts of property ownership dictated by ancient customary laws and ceremonial practices. Personal interests should not supersede American Indian culture. In short, war bonnets and other cultural items associated with war must be returned to their rightful owners, and this can only begin through sincere dialogue. The Cheyenne and Lakota and all nations of the Great Plains humbly and resolutely ask for their return.

NOTES

1. The Lakota and Cheyenne plaintiffs lost the case, but changes were eventually made by the South Dakota State Park Service to protect Indian ceremonial campers. See Fools Crow et al. v. Gullet et al., 541 U.S. 785 (1982), and Fools Crow et al. v. Gullet et al. 706 U.S. 856 (1983).


3. While working with the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Historic Preservation Office, I have come across sincere non-Indians wishing to return cultural items that were collected by their older relatives. Nevertheless, some institutions remain contentious and bitterly oppose any repatriation efforts.


18. Tall Bull’s war bonnet is now located at the New Orleans Museum of Art.


21. Grinnell, Cheyenne Indians, 2:293.


27. See Jean Afton, David Fridtjof Halaas, and Andrew E. Masich, Cheyenne Dog Soldiers: A Ledgerbook History of Coups and Combat (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1997). Red Lance depicts himself killing a U.S. soldier with a saber (28–30); Feathered Bear is depicted by artist Bear Man (150–52, 224–25); Brave Bear is depicted by himself (160–61, 174–75, 244–45). All three warriors wore the upright-style war bonnet that was unique to the Dog Soldiers.

28. See Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1:138–39, for an image from the Crazy Dog Ledger that clearly depicts a Crazy Dog counting coup on a Crow enemy. Powell mistakenly identified Crazy Dog War bonnets as single buffalo horn war bonnets: the first, in the Little Wolf Ledger, is a drawing of warriors capturing horses (1:370); the second, also in the Little Wolf Ledger, is a drawing of Yellow Eagle fending off a number of soldiers (2:986).

29. Grinnell, Cheyenne Indians, 2:78–79.


32. Ibid., 45–50.


38. Luther Standing Bear, My People the Sioux, new edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 75–76.

39. Ibid.

40. Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 104.


42. Thomas E. Mails, Fools Crow (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 140.

43. Marquis, Wooden Leg, 92.

44. Deloria, God Is Red, 272–73.

45. Grinnell, Cheyenne Indians, 2:163–64.

46. Ibid., 2:160.
47. Ibid., 2:164.
49. Ibid., 121.
50. Hyde, Life of George Bent, 213.
51. Stands In Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memo-
ries, 185.
52. Marquis, Wooden Leg, 149–51.
56. Ibid.
57. Grinnell, Cheyenne Indians, 2:112.
58. Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 286.
59. Stands In Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memo-
ries, 178; Hyde, Life of George Bent, 303.
60. Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 261.
61. Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1:352–53.
62. A thunder hat is located at the Haffenreffer Mu-
seum of Anthropology, Brown University, at Bristol,
RI (Cheyenne or Teton Dakota type; ca. 1870–1910,
RH 77-195); see Barbara A. Hail, Hau, Kóla: The Plains
Indian Collection of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropol-
yogy (Bristol, RI: Brown University, 1980), 121.
64. The Black Horse Ledger documents four in-
stances of clearly identified thunder hat wearers; see
Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1:352, 558, 560;
2:986. These drawings accurately depict unidentified
warriors wearing thunder hats comprised of red- and
white-colored eagle feathers and the skins of small
birds, as dictated by the custom. The Little Finger Nail
Ledger clearly identifies one thunder hat wearer; see
Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 2:1231. In two
other places, the ledger art from the Little Wolf Ledger
suggests that the war bonnets are the Crazy Dog style
(1:370, 2:986).
65. An Arapaho halo war bonnet is located at the
Werner Forman Archive of the British Museum in
London. See Thomas H. Flaherty, ed., The Mighty
66. A Gros Ventre or Assinibo in war bonnet is located
at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center (NA 203.354,
“Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Pohrt”). See Flaherty,
Way of the Warrior, 64.
67. Stands In Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memo-
ries, 52.
68. Standing Bear, My People the Sioux, 26.
69. Standing Bear, Land of the Spotted Eagle, 187.
70. Luther Standing Bear, My Indian Boy Hood (Lin-
coln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 89.
71. Marquis, Wooden Leg, 82–83.
72. A Lakota halo war bonnet is located at the
Hampton Museum at Hampton, VA; see Thomas H.
Flaherty, ed., The Reservations (Alexandria, VA: Time-
Life Books, 1993), 123. Two Lakota bonnets of the
halo style are located at the Colter Bay Visitor Center
in the Grand Teton National Park, at Jackson Hole,
WY (items #752 and #326); see Anna L. Walters, The
Spirit of Native America: Beauty and Mysticism in American
Indian Art (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1989), 81,
103. Another halo war bonnet is located at the Haffen-
reffer Museum (“Teton Dakota; late nineteenth, early
twentieth century collected in Oklahoma, 1940, by
Mr. and Mrs. Walter V. Clarke.” Gift, 1972); see Hail,
Hau, Kóla, 118–19.
73. Jerome A. Greene, ed., Lakota and Cheyenne: In-
dian Views of the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877 (Norman:
74. Ibid., 20–21.
75. Ibid., 19.
76. Stands In Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memo-
ries, 184–85.
78. Ibid., 340–44.
79. Ibid., 336. Grinnell’s spelling is Mohksta’eiaino.
81. A depiction of this famous rescue is found in
the Spotted Wolf–Yellow Nose Ledger; see Powell,
People of the Sacred Mountain, 2:964.
82. Stands In Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memo-
ries, 188–89.
83. Marquis, Wooden Leg, 221. 84. Marquis, Wooden Leg, 222, 244.
86. Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, 374–75.
87. Ibid., 378–79.
89. Stands In Timber and Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories*, 122.
97. See a photo of a war bonnet woman in Liberty, *Northern Cheyenne Album*, 170. For another photo of a member of this women’s society, see Thomas B. Marquis and Ronald H. Limbaugh, eds., *Cheyenne and Sioux: The Reminiscences of Four Indians and a White Soldier* (Stockton, CA: Pacific Center for Western Historical Studies, 1973), insert 12, “Big Crow and wife, 1927.”
100. Liberty, *Northern Cheyenne Album*, 146.
102. In some cases spiritual leaders used turkey or chicken feathers. One such reservation-era war bonnet is located at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center (NA 203.347, “Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Pohrt”); see Flaherty, *Way of the Warrior*, 62.