"A Pressure Not To Be Resisted or Evaded": Military Occupation, Reform, and the Incorporation of Northern Montana, 1879-1916

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“A PRESSURE NOT TO BE RESISTED OR EVADED”: MILITARY OCCUPATION, REFORM, AND THE INCORPORATION OF NORTHERN MONTANA, 1879-1916

By

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Thesis

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“A Pressure Not To Be Resisted or Evaded”: Military Occupation, Reform, and the Incorporation of Northern Montana, 1879-1916

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This thesis explores Fort Assinniboine’s role as an extension of the federal government’s military arm in the Northern Plains. It argues that the military occupation of northern Montana served to incorporate the northern borderland region and peoples into the American mainstream as a part of the national reconstruction processes following the Civil War into the twentieth century. In a period of half a century, north-central Montana transformed from a Native American common hunting ground lacking any major white settlement to a rapidly developing agricultural region. Fort Assinniboine played a central role in this transformation, hastening the economic collapse of the area’s Native populations, controlling their mobility, and making the region amenable to capitalist economic structures. While Fort Assinniboine primarily served as an antagonist to Native sovereignty during its active years, after its decommission a portion of the reserve’s land was repurposed as the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation, thereby operating as a tool for the Chippewa, Cree, and Métis to regain their sovereignty. Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military presence stationed in the Northern Plains was prerequisite for the region’s white settlement and capital development.
Introduction

In his 1872 annual report, Francis Amasa Walker, then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs, rhetorically asked: “What shall be done with the Indian as an obstacle to the progress of settlement and industry?” Walker, describing white settlers’ “exposed situation on the extreme verge of settlement,” advised that the United States government’s best means of protecting its settlers was through “buying off the hostility of the savages...by the invasion of their hunting grounds and the threatened extinction of game.” To achieve this, Walker suggested employing “the occasional use of the military arm, in restraining or chastising refractory individuals or bands,” paternalistically advocating that “such a use of the strong arm of the Government is not war, but discipline.” The Natives, Walker continued, should be placed “under a strict reformatory control by the agents of the Government...to keep Indians upon the reservations assigned them, and to arrest and return them whenever they wander away.” Walker concluded that “the two hundred and seventy-five thousand Indians west of the Mississippi...have all the elements of a large gypsy population,” and that the only possible way to both redeem the Natives and open up the West’s vast resources to white settlement was through the government agents applying “a pressure not to be resisted or evaded” to all non-compliant bands.¹

In the 1860s and 1870s, the United States government was engaged in a sweeping nation-state building enterprise. Following the culmination of the Civil War, in the period known as Reconstruction, the United States government actively sought to incorporate the rebellious states’ society and economy into the American mainstream through military occupation and the appointment of federal officials. However, Reconstruction was a vast, nation-wide process with which the U.S. sought to reform and incorporate numerous areas that remained apart from the

cohesive and expanding American empire. The legacy of Reconstruction is one—perhaps naturally—confined to the Deep South, and it is typically a narrative of mostly failed reforms resulting in the implementation of Jim Crow; however, these Reconstruction processes also took shape in the northern states, especially in the form of labor riots and labor reform, and the American West writ-large. For instance, the Military Division of the Missouri was established on January 30, 1865—mere months after the end of the Civil War—to occupy the reorganize the territory “from the British boundary on the north, to the Mexican frontier of the Rio Grande on the south, and from Chicago on the east, to the western boundaries of New Mexico, Utah, and Montana on the west.” Further, while the Fourteenth Amendment extended citizenship rights to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof,” it did not include Native peoples, who were regarded as separate, independent, and essentially “foreign” entities until 1924. Reconstruction, therefore, was a complex, national process, endeavoring to create a more integrated, connected, and cohesive nation-state, typified through occupation and the appointment of government officials, and deserves further consideration from a western vantage point.


The northern Montana borderlands, an area that the U.S. geographically claimed as early as 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase and named as part of Montana Territory in 1864, remained physically and socially isolated from the rest of the United States through the 1870s and 1880s. This thesis examines Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military’s role as an extension of “the strong arm of the Government” to reconstruct and incorporate the northern Montana subregion physically, socially, and economically into the expanding American nation-state during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In so doing, this thesis argues that the role of Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military in the Northern Plains served as an experiment in modern surveillance and policing in order to placate, order, and organize the region for white settlement and the investment of capital. The role of Fort Assinniboine and its troops in the northern borderlands can, therefore, serve as a lens through which the periods of Reconstruction, Republican ascendancy, and the subsequent Progressive Era can be reconceptualized within the larger history of the trans-Mississippi West.

This thesis explores the region of northern Montana from the Missouri River to the International Boundary from the late-1870s to 1916. Over this period of roughly forty years, the region transformed from one of the last refuges for both the northern bison population and, as a result, many Native groups from the onslaught of white encroachment during the 1870s to a perceived agricultural empire by 1916. Centering on the specific area of the Milk River Valley, this thesis examines the role of the federal government—particularly the U.S. military forces stationed at Fort Assinniboine—in reconstructing this borderlands region over which the United States’ claim remained somewhat tenuous until the 1880s and integrating it into a hegemonic, capitalistic American empire. The history of how and why this region’s transformation occurred involves several major storylines in Western history, including military occupation, the creation
of economically dependent tribal reservations, the injection of capitalist economic structures into
the region, and the pauperization of Native people. Although each of these topics have been
studied extensively, north-central Montana offers a particularly revealing setting for examining
how these threads of Western history weave together. This project contributes to each of these
historiographical conversations by presenting the establishment Fort Assinniboine as a lens
through which to reexamine the emerging American Empire. This thesis, therefore, continues
along these lines of inquiry and illustrates the centrality of Fort Assinniboine in encouraging
white settlement in north-central Montana not only during its active military years—from 1879
to the outbreak of the Spanish–American War in 1898—but perhaps even more so during its
subsequently inactive military years until its decommission in 1911.

The Bears Paw Mountains of north-central Montana first came to national attention with
the surrender of Young Joseph and the end of the Nez Perce War in 1877. Two years later, in
1879, the United States had constructed the largest military installation of its day in that same
mountain range. Fort Assinniboine, constructed in the heart of the great northern reservation
spanning most of northern Montana and comprised of various bands of Blackfeet, Assiniboine,
Gros Ventres, and others, played a critical role in organizing and bringing order to this chaotic
region, which remained largely unsettled by whites. Indeed, less than ten years after the fort’s
construction, the Great Northern Railroad cut through the landscape and a substantial white
settlement popped up roughly six miles from Fort Assinniboine. The fort, therefore, not only
played a critical role in encouraging the first white settlements into the area and the
establishment of the city of Havre, but also allowed the conditions with which to promote further
white settlement. Bringing social order to this area through policing transnational Native
movements, horse thefts and livestock slaughter, and placing a ban on the Indian liquor trade was a critical first step in the expansion of the American Empire into the region.

Fort Assinniboine, the largest military fort in the United States of its time, provides a useful lens through which to examine an expansionist American empire. Situated roughly 40 miles from the Canadian border, the fort brought order to an otherwise chaotic and threateningly unpredictable region. Quite simply, the land as it was in the late-1870s was not yet conducive to American industrial capitalism; at the same time, it’s economic utility for Native Americans was steadily declining with the bison populations. The destruction of the bison population resulted from a variety of factors; regardless of these factors, however, the reality was that a staple of Native culture, both as a major food source and an ideologically important being, was largely extinct by the mid-1880s. The ecological imperialism of the American West as a whole drastically affected groups living in north-central Montana, forcing them to cede larger portions of economically non-productive land in order to survive.⁵

Since Fort Assinniboine and north-central Montana have thus far been largely neglected from historical discussions, I draw on other historians’ frameworks in telling this story. This thesis draws upon the rich historiographies of Reconstruction and the Progressive Era in order to position Fort Assinniboine within these periods and, indeed, as a continuation of Reconstruction beyond its traditional endpoint in 1877. Instead, this thesis regards this process of national

reconstruction as a long Reconstruction in which the United States was devoted to incorporating both domestic and foreign territories into the American empire into the twentieth century.⁶

This thesis also incorporates interdisciplinary studies, such as sociology, philosophy, and political science, to consider the role of Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military in the Northern Plains in a new light. While military forts have, historically, had their effectiveness valued upon the scale and frequency of armed conflicts, this thesis argues that the lack of armed conflict in the Northern Plains following Fort Assinniboine’s establishment is a direct result of its effectiveness.⁷ In this sense, the military occupation of the Northern Plains operated akin to the “mechanisms of power” of the Panopticon, surveilling, policing, and acquiring knowledge of both the area’s environs and inhabitants.⁸ These mechanisms of power that Fort Assinniboine

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⁷ Nicholas P. Hardeman, “Brick Strong Hold of the Border: Fort Assinniboine, 1879-1911,” Montana The Magazine of Western History 29, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 54-67; some have regarded Fort Assinniboine as “anticlimactic in point of service” and that “aside from maneuvers in what is not Beaver Creek State Park there was little to occupy the troops save school, constructing buildings, tending to their copious garden, and going A.W.O.L.,” Al Lucke and Elinor Clack, “Montana in Composite,” in “Havre, Mont.,” Vertical File, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

⁸ The Panopticon, originally devised, was a concept of state control over its citizenry. The physical manifestation of this concept from Jeremy Bentham’s original drawings was most famously depicted through a penitentiary containing: a central watchtower; individual cells for prisoners surrounding the watchtower; and windows in each of the cells, which allowed backlighting to filter through the cell, thereby giving the watchman in the tower constant knowledge pertaining to each individual prisoner. A key aspect of this structure was the fact that the prisoners were unable to see into the watchtower, therefore, they were unable to know exactly when they were being watched, which, over time, instilled a condition of constant surveillance in the populous. This is the true power of the panoptic schema: it must be both “visible” and “unverifiable,” the prisoner “inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjugation.” For more on this concept, see Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 197-219; Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings,
and the U.S. military inscribed into the societies and environments on the northern Plains made a previously unorganized and commercially inefficient region legible and inherently more efficient.\(^9\)

Legibility was prerequisite for the influx of capital and settlement into the Northern Plains. Following the near-extirmination of the bison from the Northern Plains and the cession of the great northern reservation occupied by the Gros Ventres, Blackfeet, Piegan, and River Crow onto smaller, tribal reservations, the Great Northern Railway connected Fort Assinniboine to St. Paul, Minnesota and beyond. This exponentially expedited the settlement and capital investment into the area.\(^10\)

There has been much written regarding the Native actors in this story. The displacement of Native peoples by whites has, essentially, created a domino effect of displacement since first contact. White displacement of one group of Natives typically pushes that group deeper into what is designated “Indian territory,” in turn creating conflict with other Native groups for lands in a cycle of displacement. This thesis engages with Native-white struggles over land, how to use land, and how to perceive land ownership. The U.S.-Canada border, therefore, invariably plays a substantial role in this conflict in the Northern Plains. The policing of this borderlands and enforcing strict border policy restricted Natives’ traditional transnational movements, limiting


\(^{10}\) For one of the premier texts on the commodification of nature, see William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 1991); for more on the utility of the railroad to the transportation of both people and commodities, see also, Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012).
their mobility and making the region more legible and ordered. Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military—along with their Canadian counterparts, the North-West Mounted Police—were the vanguard of white expansion into the region, policing the northern border. Fort Assinniboine, originally constructed to police the region’s Native peoples, eventually became a reservation for a group of those same Natives in the Bears Paw Mountains.

Unpublished materials, such as theses and dissertations, provide useful background information into both Fort Assinniboine and the Northern Plains, or more focus on the establishment of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation. These theses and dissertations provide a biographical history of Fort Assinniboine from its establishment to its decommission; a comparative history of the incorporation of the Northern Plains and the southern Plains in the late nineteenth century; or the creation of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation, including a focus on the efforts of Montana ethnographer Frank Bird Linderman in this process. These works are

11 Natives in the Northern Plains had followed the bison for generations, and it was both an economic and cultural staple. See, “Cree Crossing,” Vertical File, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana; for more on the cultural impact of the bison, see also, White, “It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,” 219-220.


13 There is only one thesis or dissertation specifically on Fort Assinniboine, which provides mostly a biographical account of the Fort’s history from its establishment in 1879 to its decommission in 1911, Jeffrey Alan Johnson, “Border Patrols, Buffalo Soldiers, and Boredom: Fort Assinniboine, Montana, 1879-1911,” M.A. thesis, Washington State University, 2000. One dissertation that looks at the incorporation of both the northern and southern Plains in the late-nineteenth century is Andrew R. Graybill, “Instruments of Incorporation: Rangers, Mounties, and the North
all useful in providing new perspectives and background to the main contribution in this thesis. This thesis, however, differentiates itself from those works by framing the military occupation of the Northern Plains not only as a prerequisite for white settlement and capital investment but as a part of the national reconstruction projects to create a cohesive nation-state. Moreover, the framing of the military occupation of the Northern Plains as making the region more legible vis-à-vis the framework of the Panopticon offers a fresh take on military occupation, modern examples of policing and surveillance, and borderlands struggles between Natives and whites.

This thesis places Fort Assinniboine at the center of Native dispossession, white settlement, and the influx of capital into northern Montana during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While the troops stationed at the fort experienced less active engagement than other notable military forts in the Northern Plains, Fort Assinniboine and its soldiers instead exhibited a high degree of soft power. The Fort was huge, and its military reservation dominated maps in the early-1880s as the northernmost defensive and rallying position between the Missouri River and the International Boundary. Instead of utilizing aggressive militaristic domination characteristic of early Indian policy, Fort Assinniboine followed the Grant Administration’s “Peace Policy,” bringing order to the region with softer forms of coercion, such as surveillance, policing, and acquiring knowledge of both the area’s inhabitants and its environment. Fort Assinniboine’s presence prescribed order onto the Northern Plains that was...

prerequisite for the region’s development with the arrival of the Great Northern Railroad in the late-1880s and the subsequent settlement of the area.

Chapter One explores the impact of Fort Assinniboine’s establishment in 1879 to the final Cree removals in 1896. It argues that the fort and the U.S. military, in a continuation of Reconstructionist values, operated as an extension of the strong arm of the government by organizing the region and making it legible through the control of Native mobility and encouraging the decline in their traditional socioeconomic ways of life. It investigates the initial reasoning by military officials and government leaders for the necessity of a large military post between the Missouri River and the International Boundary and how the military made the Northern Plains legible. It also reveals how the military occupation of northern Montana impacted the environment and Indigenous societies in the region. The fort’s establishment undoubtedly hastened the demise of the already diminished bison population, forcing Natives on the Northern Plains to become more mobile to track game and continue their traditional ways of life. Fort Assinniboine, however, restricted Native mobility, expediting their starvation, their diminished economic prospects of hunting game, and their ultimate cession of lands onto smaller reservations. During this period, Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military’s presence served to remake the Northern Plains from an area incompatible with agricultural development into one of prime agricultural and ranching prospects.14

Chapter Two examines the settlement and development of north-central Montana from the arrival of the Great Northern Railway in 1887 to the establishment of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in 1916. This period, coming on the heels of Native land cessions onto smaller reservations.

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14 On the Canadian side of the border, Brian Hubner argues that the policing of this borderland “helped secure Canadian control of the western hinterland so the land and its inhabitants could be integrated into the new world of industrial capitalism,” Hubner, “Horse Stealing and the Borderline,” 53.
reservations in northern Montana, tracks the influx of white settlers and capital development into the region. It argues that the military occupation of northern Montana explained in the previous chapter allowed for the region’s integration into mainstream United States economic structures. Further, while Fort Assinniboine’s importance drastically decreased during and after the Spanish-American War, it had already inscribed onto the region the mechanisms of power, which then transferred to local forces to ensure order and police its citizenry. This chapter also examines the effects of the fort’s military occupation on the Chippewa, Cree, and Métis, who were landless groups in Montana for almost four decades. Their landlessness and state of wandering, which the soldiers at Fort Assinniboine had policed since the 1880s, remained into the 1910s as a legacy of American expansion and Native dispossession. Following the fort’s decommission in 1911, a relatively small portion of the military reservation’s area was set aside for those same Natives it had harried across the Northern Plains a generation previous. The rest of the fort was subsequently opened up for white homesteading and a small, valuable strip along the Beaver Creek withheld as a county park.

Due to the limitations of a master’s thesis, a lack of sources, and restrictions on time, this project gives only limited attention to concurrent American projects of nation-state building and imperial expansion. While this project investigates the processes of Reconstruction that occurred in northern Montana in the 1870s and 1880s, it does not examine these changes comparatively to other contemporaneous frontier regions or the American South. Instead, the goal of this thesis is to illuminate the process through which Reconstruction—characterized through military occupation and the appointment of federal officials to reshape an already existing society—restructured the Northern Plains through Fort Assinniboine and military occupation.
Chapter One


After capturing the non-treaty Nez Perce in the fall of 1877, Colonel Nelson Appleton Miles issued a report to his superiors in the District of Yellowstone at Fort Keogh, Montana. In this report, Miles praised the United States military’s role in advancing the line of white settlement into the area. To Miles, the role of the military was two-fold: “The occupation of the Yellowstone Valley has divided the Indian country in twain, and, second to the subjugation of the Indian, the object of military occupation has been attained in obtaining accurate and valuable information regarding the character of the country and opening the way for settlements.” Miles, having recently returned from the Bears Paw Mountains in north-central Montana, an area largely devoid of white settlement, likewise suggested that a large military post be built in that vicinity to “be near enough to observe the boundary-line, and create a barrier between the hostile Sioux and friendly Indians of Western Montana.” Miles understood that, if so constructed, “the line of [white] settlements would advance, occupying the rich valleys of the Judith Basin and Musselshell.”

Nelson Miles reflected upon the successes of the U.S. military in forcibly re-shaping the southern and western regions of Montana Territory into places amenable to American capitalism. Indeed, military occupation, to Miles, was essential to incorporating this distant and isolated region into the global market economy. However, the military occupation of the Gros Ventres, Blackfeet, Piegan, and River Crow reservation in north-central Montana as a western model of Reconstruction processes went beyond incorporating lands and peoples into the American hegemony: it also represented an early example of modernizing police tactics. The military

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occupation of the great northern reservation in Montana, therefore, altered the peoples, landscapes, and environments in the Northern Plains by instilling the soft powers of intelligence, surveillance, and organization critical to employing and maintaining the structures of industrial capitalism.

The role of the U.S. military in northern Montana marked a departure from violent engagements between Natives and whites elsewhere on the Plains; however, this does not mean that the military’s presence in the Northern Plains was useless or ineffective. Quite the contrary: the comparative lack of skirmishes involving the troops at Fort Assinniboine is indicative of its effectiveness as an outpost.\(^2\) The soft power that Fort Assinniboine exhibited allows for the conceptualization of the Northern Plains through the mechanisms of power explained in the Panopticon.\(^3\) Michel Foucault, the influential French philosopher, focused on analyzing relations of power, knowledge, and the state’s utilization of each in order to control and organize its citizenry and economy. In many of his writings, Foucault analyzed the concept of the Panopticon, originally devised by eighteenth century French philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, in order to reform eighteenth century European penal systems. The Panopticon, to both Bentham and Foucault, was not necessarily a singular architectural structure; rather, it was a concept, “a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form…a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use.”\(^4\) Panopticism, therefore, was a concept “polyvalent in

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\(^2\) Hardeman, “Brick Strong Hold of the Border,” 54-60; while in some cases settlers were on the vanguard of expansion, the military was largely responsible for holding the gains in land made by settlers during the 1870s by their presence, see, Henry N. Maguire, *The Coming Empire: A Complete and Reliable Treatise on the Black Hills, Yellowstone and Big Horn Regions* (Sioux City, Iowa: Watkins & Smead, Publishers and Stereotypers, 1878), 87-88; see also Secretary of War, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 171-172; Lieutenant General P.H. Sheridan, *Record of Engagements with Hostile Indians within the Military Division of the Missouri from 1868 to 1882* (Chicago: Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, 1882), 104.

\(^3\) In this sense, the Panopticon is not a physical place or structure, but a concept through which to effectively police and, over time, instill in a given populace the values of self-policing through constant surveillance.

its applications…Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used.” The Panopticon, thus, provides a lens through which to examine imperial processes, borderlands power struggles, and modern forms of policing and surveillance since it is “applicable ‘to all establishments whatsoever, in which, within a space not too large to be covered or commanded by buildings, a number of persons are meant to be kept under inspection.’”

Miles and the United States government, in constructing Fort Assinniboine in heart of the north-central Montana common hunting ground, sought to create a panoptic system in the U.S.-Canadian borderlands: Fort Assinniboine acted as the Panopticon’s central tower; the walls and cells of the prison were the boundaries of the northern reservation and the International Boundary; backlighting, which shed light on each individual “prisoner,” was the technological influx of telegraphs, railroads, and other means of carrying knowledge and intelligence to the Fort. This novel framing of the U.S.-Canadian borderlands allows for a new perspective with which to regard borderlands interactions, military occupations, and government-enforced restructuring of social and economic systems.

**Military Occupation, Mobility, and Policing the Northern Plains**

In the late-1870s, the Northern Plains were a hotly contested theater for the Indian Wars. A year following the Great Sioux War and Sitting Bull’s retreat across the U.S.-Canadian border in 1877, non-treaty Nez Perce also sought to gain passage into Canada in order to evade pursuant U.S. troops who wished to force the Nez Perce off of their ancestral homelands and onto a tribal reservation. In early fall of 1877, the Nez Perce, led by their charismatic leader, Young Joseph, stopped in the Bears Paw Mountains, roughly forty miles from the safety of the Canadian border,

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to rest after evading U.S. Army troops for months and thousands of miles of travel throughout Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Not only did military officials fear that the Nez Perce were fleeing to Canada to escape United States authority much like Sitting Bull had done only a year prior, but even worse, that the Nez Perce would align themselves with Sitting Bull and his Lakota followers, which could potentially stir up a pan-Indian uprising on the Northern Plains. Brevet Major-General Samuel D. Sturgis, in his report to Lieutenant G.W. Baird, Acting Assistant Adjutant-General of the District of the Yellowstone, feared the prospects of Sitting Bull’s aid and felt “certain that, if Sitting Bull should undertake to rescue the Nez Percés, he would come with an overwhelming force.” Before that could happen, however, Colonel Nelson A. Miles intercepted the non-treaty Nez Perce in the Bears Paw Mountains in north-central Montana. Ultimately, Sitting Bull could offer the Nez Perce no reinforcements, and the Battle of the Bears Paw was fought for a three-day stalemate until U.S. reinforcements arrived, forcing the Nez Perce to surrender on the fifth day, forty miles from the freedom that the “medicine line” offered.

Miles and the United States Army learned a few valuable lessons from the Nez Perce flight to Canada: first, their operations in the Northern Plains were much too spread out to prove effective; second, a vengeful Sitting Bull cast a large shadow over the Northern Plains only a day’s ride from the border and could pose major problems for American interests in the region.

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6 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1877, 513.
7 Natives living in what became the U.S.-Canadian border region have long referred to the imagined political boundary as possessing power or “medicine,” and referred to this line as the “medicine line.” Due to the political nature of the boundary, Natives recognized early in their dealings with whites that they could use this divisive boundary to their advantage: Natives could evade the punitive jurisdiction of pursuant whites by crossing from one side to the other. For more on this phenomenon, see Beth Ladow, The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland (Routledge: New York, 2001), 23-26; Sheila McManus, The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xii-xxii, 76-82; Brenden Rensink, Native But Foreign: Indigenous Immigrants and Refugees in the North American Borderlands (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2018), 44-46.
very quickly; and third, the United States military needed to embrace modern scientific advancements in order to remain a step ahead of what they regarded as primitive, yet resourceful, enemy. In his report to the District of the Yellowstone, Miles recommended remedies for all three issues. Through his experience in the Battle of the Bears Paw, Miles recommended a military fort to be constructed in the region, on a tributary of the Missouri River for the “economy of troops and supplies,” while simultaneously being “near enough to observe the boundary-line, and create a barrier between the hostile Sioux and friendly Indians of Western Montana” and advancing the line of settlement. Moreover, Miles was certain that communications, or lack thereof, were seriously hindering the Army’s effectiveness and ability to respond to crises, such as fleeing Indians. To that end, he regarded the telegraph a “military necessity,” with obvious “military advantages to be derived from its extension,” which would, however, “be incomparable with the political and commercial interests developed by opening this avenue of free communication between the Eastern States and the settlements of Montana and the Pacific slope.” In these suggestions, therefore, Miles recognized the intrinsic and inseparable relationship between military occupation and the installation of state-sponsored capitalist economic structures in frontier areas, both of which represented an expansion of the federal government’s role into American society.

Thus, despite the Nez Perce surrender, the war was far from over; the presence of Sitting Bull loomed large over much of the Northern Plains, an area which remained a contested periphery to expanding white settlement. The threat of Sitting Bull and a pan-Indian alliance descending upon the Northern Plains remained very real, too real for an area that was undergoing a population boom due to rich mining strikes and agricultural development. From the late-1870s

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8 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1877, 529-530.
9 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1877, 530.
to the late-1880s, most of northern Montana was occupied by the Gros Ventres, Piegan, Blood, Blackfeet, and River Crow Indian Reservation. Spanning from the westernmost estuaries of the Marias River, along the U.S.-Canadian border in the north, the Marias and Missouri Rivers in the south, and Dakota Territory in the east, the northern reservation was one of the largest remaining in the United States. At 17.5 million acres or 27,344 square miles, the northern reservation would be the largest in the United States today, larger than both the Navajo Nation and the entire state of West Virginia. With the threat of Sitting Bull close to the border, U.S. officials feared that, without a strong U.S. military presence, this vast area could quickly plunge into chaos with the Natives therein easily allying themselves with Sitting Bull’s cause.

United States military officials recognized the improving, yet still very tenuous, relationship that they had forced upon the Natives of northern Montana. A significant part of this relationship, U.S. military officials recognized, was due to the northern tribes’ longstanding rivalries with the Sioux, who were a common enemy they shared with the United States. However, military officials also recognized that, because of the northern tribes’ communications and contact with foreign and, presumably, less-civilized tribes, the northern tribes could easily fall back into their warlike ways. American officials believed that, due to many of the tribes’ desires to flee to Canada, that Canadian Indians retained a significant degree of their traditional ways of life. Contact and communication with what were perceived to be “uncivilized,” foreign Indians threatened to reverse the long “civilizing” processes that U.S. officials forced upon American tribes on the Plains. A military fort in the center of this dynamic space could, therefore, not only monitor the threat levels of any Native incursions upon white settlements further south, but also serve to protect against influences of foreign Indians.
Brigadier-General Alfred H. Terry, in an 1877 report, described white expansion into the Black Hills area as having “created a new frontier—a frontier which, as well as the roads leading to it, needs military protection.” In this new frontier in Dakota Territory, Terry recognized that “when Indians break away from the lower agencies and escape to the northward, their course seems to be well to the west, so far from the posts on the Missouri that it is impossible to send out troops from them in time to intercept the fugitives.” The West, Terry recognized, was vast and required greater surveillance and knowledge for the U.S. military to be truly effective. Terry understood that “A strong post on the edge of the hills would therefore serve a threefold purpose: it would give protection to settlements, miners, and ranches in the hills; it would greatly promote the safety of the roads leading to them, and it would be of no small importance as affecting the control and government of agency Indians.”

Terry, therefore, advocated the use of military posts not necessarily as having a primarily militaristic role, though this aspect obviously remained. Instead of advancing white expansion through force, these new military forts encouraged white settlement through consolidating pockets of white settlement in the West into a cohesive and singular American Empire, extending Republican values dispersed through the mechanisms of power inscribed into the region.

Terry regarded the situation in northern Montana very similarly to that in the Black Hills. In the same 1877 report, he argued that “The Indians who occupy the great reservation north of the Upper Missouri have been in an unsatisfactory state for several years past. Though nominally at peace with the United States, an unfriendly feeling toward the government seems to have prevailed…there is no doubt that from some of the tribes many individuals have joined those

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10 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1877, 519.
bands which have engaged in open hostilities.” Terry went on to describe the “many evil influences” that threatened the stateside Indians: “they are in close contact with the Sioux, who are encamped just across the frontier; they are in constant communication with the mischievous hordes of Red River half-breeds, who vibrate to and fro across the boundary, and infest the northern part of the reservation.” Terry suggested that, in order to protect the advances in assimilating the tribes below the 49th parallel and encourage white settlement in the area, preemptive action by the military was necessary: “The prospect is that sooner or later we shall have trouble with them, and I think that it is none too soon to make preparation to meet it.”

Terry proposed the construction of a large fort on the Milk River with which to patrol and survey the massive common hunting ground in northern Montana.

Nelson Miles shared a very similar viewpoint regarding the present status and short-term development in northern Montana. Miles, commanding the District of the Yellowstone, was a central figure in the reconstruction of the Northern Plains, estimating that in two years, from 1876 to 1877, he had “marched over four thousand miles…[and] captured…sixteen hundred horses, ponies, and mules [from] the hostiles,” along with capturing innumerable arms and munitions and destroying large amounts of property. Perhaps no figure would have had the first-hand experience of Miles in reshaping the territory. Recognizing the successful role that the military played in advancing the line of white settlement in southern Montana, Miles argued that similar measures were necessary to advance that line northward to the International Boundary. Miles noted that “the occupation of the Yellowstone Valley has divided Indian country in twain, and, second to the subjugation of the Indian, the object of military occupation has been attained in obtaining accurate and valuable information regarding the character of the country and

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11 Secretary of War, *Annual Report, 1877*, 519.
opening the way to settlements.” Because of the dual-pronged nature of “the subjugation of the Indian” and the intel that the military provided, “the occupation of this district has given protection to 400 miles of steamboat navigation of the Yellowstone River, and thrown open to settlement, besides the Yellowstone, the rich valleys of the Big-horn, Rosebud, Tongue, Power, and Little Missouri Rivers.” A “large post” constructed on the Milk River, Miles argued, would allow “the line of settlements [to] advance, occupying the rich valleys of the Judith Basin and the Musselshell.”

In order to protect the advance of white settlement, therefore, the U.S. military needed to build military posts whose reach extended well beyond the confines of white settlement and into the frontier. The 1879 War Department Annual Report noted that “some more permanent security [for white settlement] must be found [in northern Montana] than results from the good will of our neighbors [Canada].” The report noted that “The country north of the Missouri River from Fort Buford to Assinniboine, ‘a distance of 250 miles as the crow flies,’ is perfectly open to such incursions;” however, the report also noted the longevity and importance with which the U.S. military regarded the northern border, stating that “these two posts will be on or near the national boundary, and will continue for a long while, if not forever, our extreme northern line of defense.” The 1879 report echoed Miles’ and Terry’s recognition of the U.S. military’s central role in expanding the line of settlement, stating that “It is only four years since the Yellowstone was the northern defensive line, was infested by the most warlike Indians of the continent,” and that “the building of these posts or places of security had resulted in the rapid settlement of the whole line from Bismarck westward; so that, at the same rate of progress…like that along the Platte, will be able to take care of itself, and Keogh and Custer may be abandoned.” With the

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13 Secretary of War, *Annual Report*, 1877, 530.
military pacifying and shaping area into one that worked with capitalism, old forts could be abandoned as the line of settlement advanced, at which time the military would “move the troops northward; and probably it is wiser to jump to this conclusion and to take post at once along the national boundary.” The preemptive measures that the 1879 report proposed predicted that “very soon the progress of events will make it absolutely necessary to remove all the Indians now located on the Upper Missouri, viz, Arickarees [sic], Gros Ventres, Piegans, Bloods, and Crows, to the Sioux Reservation below Cannon Ball Creek, and to open up for settlers all the land in the region north and west of that reservation.”14 The march of U.S. imperial expansion into the Northern Plains was, therefore, a calculated endeavor aimed at displacing Native inhabitants and making the area economically efficient and compatible with capitalism.15 But U.S. imperial expansion went beyond that: condensing the land upon which Natives lived and, ultimately, confining them to reservations, gave the federal government near-constant knowledge of Native whereabouts and endeavors.

Military occupation, much like what had been exhibited in the southern states following the Civil War, at large, well-positioned posts that utilized mechanisms of power instead of outright belligerent force could be both more cost effective and more amenable toward extending American hegemony. From 1791 to 1880, the United States government expended $187,158,535 fighting the Indian Wars. However, this figure was presumed to be an extremely low estimate, not taking into account things such as pay for officers, pensions, destruction of property. Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War in 1882, surmised that, since 1791, the actual cost of the Indian

15 Rebecca Edwards argues that, while European empires in the late-nineteenth century had to look overseas for many raw materials, the United States already claimed a vast resource-rich region from which it could extract those resources and that, “Americans waged ferocious battles for control and development of what the nation had already claimed” during the 1870s and 1880s. Edwards, New Spirits, 201-204.
Wars was closer to “a thousand million of dollars.” To Stanton—and, presumably, many other politicians—this massive expenditure was due to the Natives’ wasteful and irresponsible use of land, which rarely generated a surplus. The United States government, Stanton continued, could have saved this massive sum of money if only “our 210,000 Indians had been ordinary self-supporting farmers or mechanics.”\textsuperscript{16} The cost and, in large part, ineffectiveness of aggressively removing Natives from the Plains necessitated a change in Indian policy; perhaps, strategically positioning the military as a surveilling and policing entity and not directly engaging with—and, for that matter, not inciting retaliation—Natives could be more effective in absorbing them and their lands into mainstream America.

Indeed, the United States military sought to utilize the great reservation in northern Montana as a buffer zone against Sioux depredations. The Natives living upon the great reservation, the U.S. military surmised, would be the first line of defense against any northern incursions, allowing white settlers further south the time to prepare themselves. As one 1878 Bureau of Indian Affairs report relates, “these Piegans…now become a sort of guard against any sudden irruption \textit[sic] of the Sioux. Their reservation runs along the Canada line for five degrees of longitude, and if unable to make stand at any one point against a suddenly-concentrated force, yet they could and would by scouts make widely known the movement, so that the military and settlers outside the reservation could be prepared.”\textsuperscript{17} Indian agents and military officials did not expect the stateside Natives to be able to rally and defend against a concentrated attack at a given point at the border; rather, they would be able to notice the movements of hostile bands moving southward and sound the alarm to the United States military and white settlers. In this sense, the

\textsuperscript{16} Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, \textit{Congressional Record} XIII, Part III (March 30, 1882), S. 2415.

\textsuperscript{17} Commissioner of Indian Affairs, \textit{Annual Report, 1878}, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1878), 82-83.
federal government perceived the relationship between the U.S. military and reservation Indians as one with mutual benefits: agency Natives could, in theory, rely on the firepower of the U.S. military to defend them, while the military could rely on agency intel regarding the movements and incursions of “foreign” Indians. To Piegons and the other inhabitants of the northern reservation, however, the presence of the United States military drastically hindered their mobility, directly impacting their traditional ways of life, as well as enforcing an imagined border that divided them with their Canadian kin.

Moreover, the territory within the northern reservation had obvious economic value with prime agricultural and grazing lands, as well as containing much of Montana Territory’s access to the Missouri River, which remained a well-traveled waterway. The United States needed greater surveillance in the vast area north of the Missouri River in order to quell any incursions, promote settlement, and bring social order to an area which, according to whites, remained contested and largely unorganized. Cracking down on the Indian liquor trade, which could incite violence or unpredictable behaviors, and the Native practices of horse theft and cattle killing was essential to organizing the region and encouraging white settlement.18 The horse, especially during the 1870s and 1880s, was the paramount tool for farm labor, so curtailing horse theft in the region was a paramount prerequisite for making the region economically viable for ranching and agriculture. The United States military, therefore, played an integral role in actively

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18 Hubner, “Horse Stealing and the Borderline,” 54-55; for a more economic perspective of this rationale, see, Ian Taylor, *Crime, Capitalism and Community: Three Essays in Socialist Criminology* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1983), 133-134. In this, Taylor argues that “The state’s function is in creating the conditions in which the process of [capitalist] accumulation can occur.” Any threats that might disrupt this include “kinds of behavior that are considered incompatible with the orderly pursuit of surplus value production;” for more on the policing of the Canadian Plains, see also, W.A. Fraser, “Soldier Police of the Canadian Northwest,” *McClure’s Magazine* XIII, no. 3 (July 1899); for more on crime in the Montana-Alberta borderlands, see Elofson, *Frontier Cattle Ranching*, 209-210.
incorporating this large borderland area into the American mainstream through military occupation as an extension of national Reconstruction processes.\(^\text{19}\)

Fort Assinniboine was constructed in 1879 along the Milk River to strengthen the American military presence in the heart of the northern Montana Indian reservation. The Indian Wars were not over, especially with Sitting Bull at-large in Canada, and the constant threat of Native attacks created a sense of fear and uncertainty that did not benefit the promotion of white settlement and economic development into the area. One such way to combat the threat of Native incursion was through monitoring Native movements, especially across the U.S.-Canadian border. As one report from the War Department stated, “The vicinity of [Fort Assinniboine]…will be constantly patrolled by two companies of the 2d Cavalry, in order to obtain early warning of any hostile movement on the part of the redskins.”\(^\text{20}\)

Controlling Native mobility—or, at the very least, surveying their movements—provided U.S. officials with valuable intel regarding potential incursions and threats of pan-Indian alliances. Moreover, restricting Native mobility decreased horse and livestock theft, both of which were central to Plains Indians’ cultural and economic sovereignty.\(^\text{21}\)

Fort Assinniboine, aside from providing added military authority into the area, was itself physically imposing. Constructed entirely of brick, Fort Assinniboine was a commanding


\(^{21}\) Brian Hubner argues that, along with the economic impacts of horse theft and cattle slaughter, criminalizing and policing horse theft simultaneously served as part of the “civilizing” process on Native groups and “continued the process of bringing a preindustrial people and their land, into the capitalist economy.” Hubner, “Horse Stealing and the Borderline,” 54-55; for more on the importance of the bison to Plains societies, see also, White, “It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,” 219-221.
presence on the Northern Plains; however, the U.S. military imposition did not end at the colossal Fort’s construction material: the fort’s reservation was likewise massive. Encompassing 704,000 acres or 1,100 square miles in the heart of the northern Montana Indian reservation, the Fort Assinniboine Military reservation was one of the largest military fortresses in United States history and was situated upon a reservation “40 miles long by 15 miles wide.”\textsuperscript{22} For perspective, the military reservation’s area at its peak in 1880 was more than two-times larger than the total area of present-day Los Angeles. Not coincidentally, the Fort was constructed only a few miles west of the Bears Paw Battlefield where Young Joseph surrendered only a year prior. Later, following the cession of the northern Montana Indian Reservation into smaller individual reservations, the area of the Fort was reduced to the less-imposing 220,000 acres (344 square miles), which is roughly equivalent to the modern-day city of Fort Worth, Texas. Thus, Fort Assinniboine provided the United States military with a commanding presence in the heart of the northern Montana Indian reservation, an area which remained relatively unsettled by whites.

The 18\textsuperscript{th} Infantry, stationed in Atlanta, Georgia in the late 1870s, was recommissioned to Fort Assinniboine and became the first troops to man the new fort. Traveling by rail to Bismarck, North Dakota, riding a steamboat from Bismarck to Coal Banks, Montana, and the final 40 miles to Assinniboine on foot, the 18\textsuperscript{th} quickly realized the nature of north-central Montana.\textsuperscript{23} While on their overland march, the 18\textsuperscript{th} encountered a group of friendly Gros Ventres, who engaged with a “war party of Yanktonnais [sic]…in which the Gros Ventres were worsted, the Yanktonnais securing three scalps.” Following the skirmish, Sitting Bull sent General Ruger “word that he would not allow a military post to be built on Beaver Creek,” to which Ruger replied, “We’ll

\textsuperscript{22} Army and Navy Journal, December 25, 1880.

\textsuperscript{23} “Indian Affairs,” Army and Navy Journal, January 22, 1881.
built [sic] it though, and it will be impossible for the Bull to raise a force large enough to make Ruger break his word.”

While the Fort was successfully constructed, Sitting Bull, along with various bands of Canadian Indians, actively resisted the military’s authority in the area in order to preserve their traditional ways of life. Northern tribes from both sides of the border engaged in small, impetuous raids on northern Montana settlements, stealing horses, lighting fires, and slaughtering cattle as a means to disrupt the advance of white settlement. In the summer of 1879, for instance, the military reported “many depredations” around the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, due to “large numbers of hostiles, half-breeds and foreign Indians…including the Indians under Sitting Bull…roaming upon United States territory, south of the boundary line…estimated at not less than five thousand Indians, of whom two thousand were warriors, with twelve thousand horses.”

While military estimations of Native troop size have, historically, been woefully overblown, these reports hold water for the influence they would have had on both the military and the public. Higher numbers of “hostile Indians” would have garnered more support for a swift militaristic response to what was perceived as a very dangerous problem.

Construction of the Fort commenced immediately after its approval by the federal government. The swiftness with which the federal government acted and the haste with which the fort was built reveals the dire sentiment regarding the situation along the Montana U.S.-Canadian border. To build the fort, “about two hundred carpenters, masons, and laborers” from St. Paul were employed and were furnished transportation to and from the new post. One journalist dubbed Assinniboine “the magic military post,” due to its near-overnight

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25 Sheridan, Record of Engagements, 86.
Another journalist regarded the construction crew as an “army of employees.” Another writer, touring the Fort during its construction phase, likened the camp to “an army corps in war times. It is a city of tents and they deck the plains with white for almost a mile square…There are enough workmen to lay 75,000 brick per day.” Newspapers, along with the federal government, recognized the Fort’s construction as imperative to expanding white settlement into the area and providing the northern borderlands area with the requisite defensive positions to protect those settlements post-haste.

Fort Assinniboine was a large military outpost in the middle of an enormous Native common hunting ground, far distant from many major population centers. One historian has described Fort Assinniboine as a “self-contained town,” due to its remote location, size, and the various amenities offered within its spacious confines. Due to its numerous amenities and on-site businesses, Assinniboine was home to a number of civilian workers, as well as the families of officers stationed there. Indeed, in its first year of existence, the Fort witnessed the birth “of a daughter to the wife of Sergeant John Ogle, on August 18, 1879.” In 1880, a report in the War Department noted that Assinniboine was preparing for a “[social] awakening” with the addition of Mr. Broadwater’s and Col. Lee’s families to the fort. The 1880 census of the Fort reveals that about 500 people lived at Fort Assinniboine, roughly 100 of whom were wives, children, unmarried women, or servants, excluding numerous civilians. Similarly, Assinniboine hosted

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29 Helena Weekly Herald, 1879.
31 “Fort Assinniboine,” Army and Navy Journal, August 28, 1880; for more on families at the Fort, especially the presence of children, see also “Memoranda,” April 8, 1883, Box 4, Folder 4, Fort Assinniboine Records, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana; “Fort Assinniboine Census, 1880,” Vertical File, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.
“the first marriage…of a civilian carpenter to a French half breed girl,” while “The first army wedding did not take place until January 8, 1881, when Chaplain Dodd married Joseph Benton to Emma Smith.”33 Due to its isolation in the Northern Plains, Fort Assinniboine functioned as a town within itself, with civilian workers, women, and children residing there, as well as hosting a trading post and other small businesses to provide life’s necessities. In this sense, the fort was a bastion of white settlement and organization in the middle of a chaotic and dynamic common hunting ground.

**Fort Assinniboine and the Changing Environs of the Northern Plains**

Along with the physical imposition of the Fort itself onto the landscape of the Northern Plains, the peopling of the Fort and the surrounding area caused environmental damage that directly impacted Native foodways and economies. Despite attaining some degree of self-sufficiency, the Fort could not provide for all of life’s necessities, and the influx of soldiers, their families, and various personnel required food and goods brought to the Fort. Many soldiers described the area as a hunters’ paradise, rife with game; however, to the Natives of the northern reservation, the game upon which they relied for survival was rapidly depleting. By the mid-1880s, the bison, a staple for many Plains Indians’ diets, was slaughtered near to the point of total extinction.34 The overhunting of the Northern Plains made the area drastically less economically viable for the Natives inhabiting it. Less food meant starvation and less goods with which to trade, while the U.S. military’s crackdown on horse and livestock theft heightened the issue, which, in turn, made theft an even more attractive option for desperate Native groups. As historian Richard White argues, “The elimination of the buffalo…cut the heart from the Plains

34 My understanding of the decline of the bison population is heavily influenced by Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
Indian economy…Without the buffalo, Plains Indians could not effectively resist American expansion.”  

The environmental damage that the peopling of the Fort—as well as the subsequent white settlement of the area—exacerbated already declining Native foodways and economies and increased their need to steal in order to survive.

For the Native groups living in north-central Montana, the depletion of game meant that greater mobility was required to provide food and resources basic to survival. Following what small bison herds remained and venturing further and further from what U.S. officials regarded as their “homes” inevitably led to increased contact with both white settlers and other Native bands. While Natives required increased mobility to provide for themselves, both U.S. and Canadian officials sought to decrease Native mobility and entangle them in the stationary and “civilized” economic mode of capitalism. This state-sponsored capitalism, then, produced dependency for Native groups upon the federal government in the form of welfare to provide land, tools, and knowledge that was foreign to many tribes on the Northern Plains.

The act of stealing horses or livestock had always been an essential part of Plains Indian culture, both as a means of economic production and as a cultural indicator of one’s manhood. Increased scarcity in the Northern Plains, then, greatly damaged both the ability for Native men to provide economically and directly challenged their means of social advancement. The construction of Fort Assinniboine and the ensuing alterations to the northern Great Plains ecosystem made non-reservation Native men frantic and more aggressive in search of food and status. As one War Department report in 1881 pointed out, “the Indians of the Northwestern British provinces…have vibrated across the frontier, following the herds of buffalo, and coming

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35 White, “It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,” 219.
37 Hubner, “Horse Stealing and the Borderline,” 57.
as far south as the Judith Basin and the valley of the Musselshell.”38 Not only did the arrival of Natives from north of the boundary further congest an already cramped and over-hunted hunting ground, but drew Natives further southward in search of bison, especially into the rich valleys in central Montana that had recently become prime grazing lands for the massive cattle operations moving into the area.39 Government-backed professional bison hunters and the influx of invasive livestock into the Plains led Joseph Nimmo, Jr., Chief of the Bureau of Statistics, to declare in 1885 that, in a period of twenty years, “the cowboy has superseded the Indian, and the Texas steer has supplanted the buffalo.”40 This rapid ecological and social change, however, owed its haste to military occupation in creating an ordered society. In 1882, Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan concluded that “much of the country which, at the beginning of that period [of military occupation in the Plains fifteen years prior], was monopolized by the buffalo and the Indian, has now been opened to the settler, to the railroad, and to civilization.”41 The Northern Plains were experiencing a cataclysmic change in ecosystem that saw the destruction of the bison populations supplanted by large-scale cattle and sheep ranching operations, creating an economic and cultural crisis for the region’s Native populations.

The increased aggressiveness of Natives, however, played directly into the U.S. military’s picture of non-reservation Natives as wild, savage, and unpredictable, all of which required white intervention to ameliorate. While reservation Indians could, in theory, rely on consistent rations and annuities, as well as requisite training in agriculture, non-reservation

39 Traveling further on hunts inevitably brought hungry Natives in contact both with each other and with white stockmen, who feared the starving Indians, and sought to protect their stock interests at all costs. See, Hogue, Mètis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 146-148.
41 Sheridan, Record of Engagements, 103.
Indians lived in a world with increasing economic uncertainty, and the United States used that vulnerability as leverage. In reality, however, food scarcity was a major crisis for both reservation and non-reservation groups, especially in the early 1880s. The collapse of the northern bison population finally forced Sitting Bull to surrender to American forces after evading their reach for four years. During the especially pronounced starving period from 1883 to 1884, a Piegan named Almost-a-Dog accounted for those lost to starvation by cutting a notch in a willow stick for each death with the stick totaling 555 notches, which is believed to have been between one-fourth and one-sixth of Montana’s total Piegan population.\textsuperscript{42} Montana newspapers and national magazines covered this starving period and grimly forecasted that, without government intervention and rations, the Indians would set out on filling their bellies with the bountiful cattle that dominated the Plains. Quite simply, for the Montana stock interests, “Trouble [was] feared.”\textsuperscript{43} Fort Assinniboine was, in part, constructed as a means to defend the progress taken toward protecting reservation Indians from outside influences of non-reservation groups. In this sense, the construction of the Fort and the added military presence in the heart of the northern Montana reservation served as a tool to both defend and promote the development of industrial capitalism into the region, both among Indians and whites.\textsuperscript{44}

With the construction of Fort Assinniboine, military officials, as well as white settlers in Montana, advocated for the construction of a robust telegraph system. While military posts scattered throughout the West brought increasingly larger pockets of white settlement to an otherwise intimidating frontier, shortening the distances between white settlements, telegraphs hastened the relays in which information could travel from post to post, rural settlements to

\textsuperscript{43} “Starving to Death,” \textit{Forest and Stream} XXII, no. 2 (July 1884): 442.
\textsuperscript{44} Hubner, “Horse Stealing and the Borderline,” 54-57.
urban cities, West Coast to East Coast, and United States to foreign governments. As one petition at the Montana State Legislature in 1879 explained, the telegraph “would enable the military to have timely notice of any uprising among the tribes of Indians [in the northwest] and thus be enabled to prevent such hostile bands from entering and passing through our settlements, as did the Nez Perces in 1877.” The telegraph, the memorialists continued, would promote “the interests of the government…and the business of this Territory promoted, and a feeling of security from sudden attacks of hostile Indians on our borders strengthened.”45 Indeed, in the year of 1879 alone, 798 miles of telegraph line was constructed in the Northwestern system, “connecting Bozeman with Fort Assinniboine, the northern terminus, through Radersburg, Helena, Forts Shaw and Benton.”46 Cedar telegraph poles were harvested in Minnesota and shipped as far west as Fort Benton, after which they were distributed by wagon wherever they were needed. Troops were oftentimes assigned the task of constructing the telegraph lines, thereby lowering construction costs. While telegraph lines were initially constructed for military purposes, they soon operated a commercial business which, in turn, allowed them to become in large part self-sustaining. In a five-year span, from 1875 to 1880, the military strung nearly 10,000 miles of telegraph line to “cover the frontier and connect all important military posts and towns in those sections.”47 By the time of Fort Assinniboine’s construction, therefore, Montanans remained noticeably fearful of potential Indian attacks and movements altogether. The telegraph, like the Fort, both expanded the federal government’s presence into society and further provided white settlers with a peace of mind of knowing that Natives were under the

45 “House Joint Memorial in relation to military telegraph,” Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the Territory of Montana Passed at the Eleventh Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly (Helena, Mont.: Andrew J. Fisk, 1879), 133.
constant and watchful eye of the U.S. military. In northern Montana, the implementation of the telegraph and other technological advancements allowed information to travel faster regarding the movements and whereabouts of Native inhabitants, thereby giving the U.S. government power in the form of surveillance, hastening their ability to both swiftly curtail crimes harmful to capitalist development and hinder Native mobility in the region.

Resisting and refusing to submit to the advance of white settlement immediately made those Indians “savages” and enemies of the United States, according to U.S. officials. Those Native groups who did, however, submit to the will of American imperial ambition, namely removing Indians to reservations to open up large swaths of land for industrial capitalism, were taken in as wards of the paternalistic state. Put simply, there were “good” Indians and there were “bad” Indians; those who submitted to the will of Republican governance and industrial capitalism, and those who vehemently rejected it. With this perspective, military officials feared that prolonged contact with “bad” bands of foreign Indians could easily influence and revert “good” bands of domestic tribes back into conflict with the United States.

Sitting Bull was the paramount “bad” Indian of the 1870s and 1880s, directly standing in the way of industrial capitalism’s advance into the Northern Plains. Sitting Bull was adamant in his position against the white invasion, and proved to be a thorn in the side of the U.S. military during the early years of Fort Assinniboine’s military occupation. Before the fort’s military occupation, in a post-battle letter to Lieutenant-Colonel Elwell Stephen Otis written in 1876, Sitting Bull made clear his desires: “I want [you] to know what you are doing traveling on this road. You scare all the buffalo away. I want to hunt on the place. I want you to turn back from

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48 The telegraph also enabled international communications between the U.S. military and their counterparts on the Canadian Plains, the Northwest Mounted Police, allowing for the swift relay of knowledge pertaining to Native whereabouts and information regarding horse theft, livestock slaughter, and other crimes. Hubner, “Horse Stealing and the Borderline,” 66-67.
here. If you don’t, I will fight you again. I want you to leave what you have got here, and turn back from here.” Otis, in his post-battle report, related that the Sioux “were very angry because our trains were driving away the buffalo…that they were hungry and without ammunition, and that they especially wished to obtain the latter…I informed them that I could not give them ammunition; that had they saved the amount already wasted upon the train it would have sufficed them for hunting purposes for a long time.”49

Sitting Bull continued to navigate the international boundary line into the 1880s. In January 1881, Sitting Bull and his followers camped along the mouth of the Milk River. Brigadier-General Terry, describing the situation to General Thomas H. Ruger, explained that a scout from Fort Buford had been sent to complete negotiations arranging Sitting Bull’s surrender; however, “Should these negotiations fail, [Major Guido] Ilges will start with all speed for, and attack the Indian camp. Ilges suggest that if a suitable force should move down the Milk River from Fort Assinniboine, so as to get into Sitting Bull’s rear, his capture will be rendered certain.”50 Ilges, in his letter to Camp Poplar River, suggested that “a demonstration down Milk River from Assinniboine would help…but don’t need it to accomplish the end.”51 Terry, however, remained reluctant to order the movement from Assinniboine, uncertain of the troops’ ability to embark on a winter campaign, “but if it be possible to make the movement I desire it to be made. The troops sent should be the two companies of the 2d Cavalry at the post, and a sufficient number of 18th Infantry to make the whole force 200 strong. One shell gun should be taken.”52

49 Secretary of War, *Annual Report, 1877*, 491.
52 “Indian Affairs,” *Army and Navy Journal*, January 22, 1881.
The United States was at war with a “foreign” belligerent in 1881, and news of this conflict captivated a national audience. Reporters across the nation sought to deliver news regarding the man whom many regarded as one of the last obstacles to white expansion in the Northern Plains. A correspondent of the *New York Herald*, at Fort Assinniboine, wrote that “If he should [surrender] all will be well, but if he refuses, then the troops will attack him and compel his surrender. It is not the intention of the Government to allow Sitting Bull under any circumstances whatever to return to British soil…Scout Allison is believed to be now in Sitting Bull’s camp trying to persuade him to a peaceful surrender, but while he talks the troops are closing around Sitting Bull with the full determination to attack should he resist the wishes of the Government.” The *Herald* correspondent went on to describe the outfitting of each soldier:

“Each soldier is supplied with a buffalo overcoat, fur cap, gloves, and Arctic overshoes. The men have Sibley tents and stoves and plenty of blankets. Each soldier carries a few rounds of ammunition in his belt, and 250 rounds per man are in the wagons, in case it should be needed. One Gatling gun and one three-inch shell gun accompanies the column, well supplied with ammunition.”53 Clearly, with all of that firepower at the ready, the United States was prepared to either secure Sitting Bull’s surrender and imprisonment or execute the complete annihilation of his band. One way or another, the Great Sioux War was going to be put to an end, and the threat of Sitting Bull putting together a pan-Indian alliance would be eradicated. With Sitting Bull’s submission, the last major resistance against white settlement into the region was eliminated.

Despite the military’s preparation to block Sitting Bull’s return to Canada, however, he managed to evade authorities once more. Roughly half of his band—50 lodges—decided to

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surrender, while the other half, led by Sitting Bull, moved north to the border. Sitting Bull and his band of 40 lodges could not hold out forever as food continued to be increasingly difficult to find in the Northern Plains. As long as the Sioux refused to surrender to the U.S. military, white fears would persist, and the state of war would continue in the region. Finally, in the summer of 1881, Sitting Bull and his remaining followers surrendered, primarily due to food scarcity. With his surrender, the U.S. military declared that “all of the hostile Sioux are in the hands of the government, and those who remain in the British provinces are too few in number and too much broken in spirit to leave room for apprehension of annoyance from them. The Sioux War, which commenced in 1876…is finally closed.” However, although Sitting Bull and the war with the Sioux had finally ended, the Northern Plains remained an area of conflict and uncertainty, still requiring the forces at Fort Assinniboine to bring order to the region.

Following Sitting Bull’s surrender in 1881, Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military almost immediately shifted their gaze to the Cree Indians, who were repeatedly coming down from Canada in search for food. A St. Paul, Minnesota newspaper article from 1883, titled “The Crees With War Paint On,” warned that “the Cree Indians are preparing for general war. Three hundred lodges under Big Bear, Lucky Man and Little Pine are camped within twenty-five miles of Fort Walsh, Northwest territory, preparatory to cross into Montana to avenge the loss of Crees in the late horse stealing raid.” The horse raid at the heart of the issue, the newspaper continued, happened “a few days ago [when Cree raiders] stole forty horses.” The newspaper believed that the Cree would cross the border and first come into conflict with Gros Ventres and Assiniboine Indians, which would spark an all-out war in the region. The newspaper grimly concluded that

55 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1881, 107-108, see also pages 81-83, 92-93, 98-106.
“the stock interests of northern Montana are sure to suffer, and no white man’s life will be safe on the prairies.”

This article is telling; not only does it position Natives as stereotypical wild vagrants, but it also shows the importance of Assinniboine in bringing order to the area and quelling such conflict. Moreover, it ties Fort Assinniboine to white economic interests: the fort, in 1883, was all that stood between economic prosperity on the range and complete disaster brought on by Indian warfare.

To the Montana ranchers who were slowly moving their grazing ranges ever northward into the common hunting ground, starving, wandering groups of Natives posed a significant problem. Natives preferred to hunt the bison, as was their custom, but desperate times made cattle an attractive second option. Undoubtedly, Natives did engage in killing white settlers’ livestock; however, the degree to which these depredations actually occurred is almost certainly exaggerated: white settlers, especially ranchers, made false claims of slaughtered cattle and framed the acts on Natives in order to bring harsher punitive measures against the Natives.

Indeed, records indicate that both Canadian and U.S. soldiers encouraged killing cattle in ways that made the act appear to have been done by Natives, even going so far as to stage killings. One report indicates that a Mountie killed an unidentified animal, dressed it, and prepared it on meat sticks, as was Native fashion. “The next day he would lead his Sergeant to the scene of the crime. The Sergeant would take out his report book, and confirm an ‘Indian’ killing by

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inspecting the meat sticks and the brand on the animals hide nearby.” Similarly, Con Price, a Montana cowboy, recalled an instance when he was helping the Mounties patrol the cattle herds along the border in which they instructed him to “kill all the beef [they] could eat.” While roving bands of hungry Indians posed real problems for cattle ranchers seeking to protect their property, their claims of Indian killings were undoubtedly overblown; however, military officials utilized this fear and anger of Native depredations in order to easily and cheaply feed their own operations, further fueling the anti-Native sentiment of ranchers and whites in the border region more generally.

American and Canadian conflict with the Cree reached its climax in the Second Riel Rebellion of 1885. Following this armed conflict, several Crees, including Little Bear, who was the son of the Cree Chief and key player in the Rebellion, Big Bear, fled the Canadian government into Montana. The Cree presence upset not only white settlers and the federal government, but also reservation Indians, all of whom “considered them to be a threat to peace and property, and the army feared that if they were not apprehended and returned to Canada more would come.” Acting on these fears, white settlers called on federal military intervention to take care of “roving Crees.” An 1896 edition of the Anaconda Standard published an article titled, “To Round Up Crees,” stated that the “700 soldiers” stationed at Fort Assinniboine, most of whom were cavalry, would “be used to round up the roving Crees and escort them to the international boundary line.” The Cree deportation in the 1890s reveals the centrality of the

60 Con Price, Memories of Old Montana (Hollywood, Cal.: Highland Press, [1945]), 45; Elofson, Frontier Cattle Ranching, 85.
62 “To Round Up Crees,” Anaconda Standard, June 6, 1896; for a more in-depth discussion on the issue of Cree nationality, see also, Brenden Rensink, Native But Foreign: Indigenous Immigrants and Refugees in the North American Borderlands (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2018.)
federal government and its military arm in maintaining order. Troops stationed at Fort Assinniboine did not participate in any notable battles or skirmishes; instead, its role as a federal police force behind its large, brick walls emitted an aura which perhaps surpasses significance in any battle. Fort Assinniboine’s significance is in its role as peacekeeper, especially concerning questions of nationality.

Conclusion

The military occupation of the Northern Plains, especially in northern Montana with the construction of Fort Assinniboine was part of the broader process of Reconstruction. Much like Union occupation of the South after the Civil War, U.S. military occupation of northern Montana transformed the area into one that efficiently and effectively supported capitalistic enterprise. By 1884, the Secretary of War admitted “every year shows that although the Indian question, so far as hard fighting is concerned, is now practically eliminated from military considerations, the control of Indian reservations in sparsely settled sections, and the encouragement which should be given to actual settlement, involve conditions in the settlement of which the services of the military in the West cannot be safely dispensed with for many years to come.” Strong-arming peripheral hinterlands through military force and occupation can, therefore, be viewed as actively promoting state-sponsored capitalism; actors in these hinterlands would conform, either through their own volition or through military intervention. Major-General George McClellan, in 1886, wrote in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* regarding what he saw as an “ever-burning Indian question—so often ‘finally settled,’ only to break out again almost with the regularity of machinery.” McClellan argued that without the constant presence and surveillance of the military

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“it is idle to expect a cessation of these outbreaks so constantly occurring throughout the vast territory dotted by their reservations.”\textsuperscript{65} In both the South and the Northern Plains, the military presence was used to physically alter and culturally reorganize these spaces, integrating them into mainstream American society.

From its opening in 1879 to its decommission in 1911, Fort Assinniboine served the purpose of bringing order to what white settlers regarded as a chaotic and largely unorganized frontier area. The military presence that the Fort provided allowed for the policing of Native groups, which was perhaps the first step in making the area attractive for white settlement. Ten years after its opening, railroad magnate James Jerome Hill purchased the rights of the defunct St. Paul & Pacific Railway, as well as consolidating other rail systems he owned into the Great Northern Railway. Open for operation in 1887, the Great Northern connected the meatpacking industry of Chicago to the lumber and grain production of northern Wisconsin and Minnesota to its terminus at the port city of Seattle. Between these emerging metropoles, however, the road spurred settlement into largely unsettled areas. Regarded during his lifetime as “The Empire Builder,” James J. Hill’s Great Northern did just that: consolidating the disparate “islands” of an emerging American Empire into a cohesive and singular unit by connecting the nation in a web of steel and capitalist ambition.\textsuperscript{66}


\textsuperscript{66} For more on the Progressive Era and the disparate “island communities” that the nation sought to consolidate and bring into the national fold, see Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); for more on the Great Northern and James J. Hill, see also Richard White, Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012); see also, Edwards, New Spirits, 220-221.
Chapter Two

The Inland Empire: Fort Assinniboine and the Incorporation of the Northern Plains, 1887-1916

In his 1882 memoir of his military service, particularly regarding his active role in the Indian Wars from 1868 to 1882, Union veteran General Philip H. Sheridan described the necessity of the army as the vanguard of westward American expansion. Sheridan inherently linked the role of the military to the commodification of the untapped wealth of the West. “Across Dakota and Montana, today,” wrote the aging Sheridan, “the working parties of the Northern Pacific, escorted by the troops, are rapidly adding another complete trans-continental highway, and over all of the foregoing roads are pouring thousands of cars loaded with cattle, to furnish eastern markets with their daily supply of beef.”

Where once “the wild and irresponsible tribes wandered, redeemed from idle waste [the West became] a home for millions of progressive people.” Sheridan regarded the expansion of America’s imperial reach as a process: the military would pacify and make the region suitable for settlement and capital development, after which point, “the railroads overtook the successive lines of isolated frontier posts, and settlements spread out over our country no longer requiring military protection, the army vacated its temporary shelters and marched on into remote regions beyond, there to repeat and continue its pioneer work.”

To Sheridan, the military’s responsibility did not end with the settlement of the West; instead, he regarded the military’s role as an unending process of imperialism not only extending across the Plains, but across the globe. With the United States military firmly entrenched on the

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1 Sheridan, Record of Engagements, 103; for more on the cattle boom in the 1880s and the “cattle-beef complex” that drove consumer demand for beef, see Joshua Specht, Red Meat Republic: A Hoof-to-Table History of How Beef Changed America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
2 Sheridan, Record of Engagements, 103-104.
front lines of American hegemony spreading across the country, “In rear of the advancing line of troops, the…frontiersmen, were steadily replaced by the tasteful houses, thrifty farms, neat villages and busy towns of a people who knew how best to employ the vast resources of the great West.” With the military occupation pacifying previously unorganized regions, the second wave of settlement could commence: the large-scale civilian settlement and development of capital. To Sheridan, the Interior West and the Northern Plains represented one of the final frontiers that remained distinctly separate mainstream America. However, due to military occupation, the confinement of most of the area’s tribes onto reservations, and the Great Northern and the other transcontinental railroads tying together the national community in a web of steel track, Sheridan concluded that “the civilization from the Atlantic is now reaching out toward that…long intervening strip of territory, from the British Possessions to Old Mexico, yearly growing narrower; finally the dividing lines [of ‘civilized’ settlement on the East and West coasts] will entirely disappear, and the mingling of settlements absorb the remnants of the once powerful Indian nations.”

With the mechanisms of power inscribed onto Northern Plains society by the late-1880s, large-scale settlement could occur. Towns sprang up along the railroads, creating local and regional market centers that offered similar amenities and services. Surplus capital could be created in diverse industries outside of the extractive industries, and that capital could be spent, injecting itself into local and national economies. The federal government, for its part, aided in this economic development by passing laws that made the accretion of capital easier through the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, doubling the acreage of the original Homestead Act of 1862. The role of the federal government in this region—and the nation, more generally—undeniably

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3 Sheridan, *Record of Engagements*, 103-104; for more on the perspective of “eastern frontier settlements…rapidly passing westward…until they meet in Montana,” see also, Secretary of War, *Annual Report, 1881*, 81-83.
owed its newfound influence in local affairs to national reconstruction processes and Republican ascendency.

Despite the lessened military influence in the Northern Plains, the influence of the federal government was firmly in place. Fort Assinniboine, nearly abandoned around the turn-of-the-century to deploy its manpower in overseas imperial projects, remained as a legacy of imperialism from a generation previous. Controlling Native movements, however, wreaked havoc for formerly transnational Native peoples, leaving them homeless for four decades. In 1916, after two generations of wandering throughout Montana, however, the federal government granted the “landless” Indians a home—in an area that was their traditional homelands—at the recently abandoned Fort Assinniboine. The legacy of imperialism in the Northern Plains, therefore, came full circle, with the establishment of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in the Bears Paw Mountain range: the same range in which Young Joseph was defeated and the military presence in northern Montana was first established almost forty years prior.

**Integrating an Empire and Incorporating the Northern Plains**

In 1900, the Great Northern Railway published an informative pamphlet for prospective settlers and would-be passengers describing the nature of its route. The pamphlet, in true propagandistic fashion, boasted that “The Track of the Great Northern is the Track of Empire.” That bolded tagline, situated beneath a map of the Great Northern mainline and its connections, was supported with a similarly boastful clarification: “The greatest commercial development of the next twenty years will be in the territory represented by the above map.”

A couple of pages later, the pamphlet focused on one subregion in particular: the Milk River Valley of northern Montana. “The Milk River Valley of Montana will make you rich and independent,” the

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pamphlet promised, allowing any American citizen the ability secure 160 acres of free homestead land with another 160 acres from the government for just “25 cents an acre cash and $1.00 an acre after four years.” As with many places in the American West during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Milk River Valley provided a seemingly incredible land-owning opportunity for industrious individuals. With most of the prime growing lands in the East already occupied, eastern farmers could rent plots of land from large landholders; the vast public domain of the West, on the other hand, offered land ownership for those who otherwise may not have been able to acquire their own lands in the East. The Great Northern recognized this, imploring customers to “not spend your life renting high-priced Eastern land,” with western lands lifting settlers from serfdom and granting them a degree of economic independence.5

The northernmost of the three transcontinental railroads, the Great Northern stretched from St. Paul, Minnesota to Helena, Montana—later extending to Seattle, Washington in 1893—along the northern boundary of the United States. A significant amount of territory along the route—particularly that which had been once maligned as the “Great American Desert”—had recently been appropriated into the public domain due to the ecological destruction of the Northern Plains, which had forced Natives to cede their lands. However, the removal of Native groups from the territory, as well as technological and scientific advancement, required white settlers to adapt to the terrain in order to make its settlement agriculturally viable. This movement toward scientific and technological advancement subscribed to the ideals of the Progressive Era and the conservation movement, which desired to use natural resources in a more organized and efficient way and thereby conserve them for future use. Thus, white

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5 Great Northern Railway, “General Information About Montana,” 51.
settlement into the area depended on federal intervention and organization of the newly settled western lands, while the federal government simultaneously relied upon local knowledge of white settlers and the burgeoning professional class in order to reshape the region’s communities.\textsuperscript{6}

The military occupation of the northern reservation facilitated the increased federal presence in both the Northern Plains and the West more generally. From Fort Assinniboine’s establishment in 1879 until 1887, when the Great Northern Railway connected the fort to Helena, Montana and St. Paul, Minnesota, the military presence in the Northern Plains represented an increased presence of the federal government that intruded into the lives of both Natives and white settlers. The panoptic nature of Fort Assinniboine, in turn, made both the social and physical environments ordered, more efficient and, thus, amenable to capital development and accretion. James C. Scott, a renowned political scientist and anthropologist, described the process of state projects to immobilize mobile groups as “a state’s attempt to make a society legible.” The need for social—and environmental—legibility, Scott argued, “transcended regional geography…Efforts to permanently settle these mobile peoples (sedentarization) seemed to be a perennial state project.” Before a concerted state effort toward social legibility, states were, in effect, “partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity…As a result, its interventions were

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\item[\textsuperscript{6}] This concept, which has been described as “mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon,” is discussed in environmental historians’ theory of the “tragedy of the commons.” The tragedy of the commons theorizes that, in a world of limited resources, the rational individual would have more incentive to increase their resource usage, in this theory, adding cattle to their stock holdings. Because it is in each individual’s best interest to continue increasing their herds, the federal government should put organizational checks into place that block individuals from perpetually increasing their resource usage. For more on this, see Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” \textit{Science} 162, no. 3859 (December 1968): 1243-1248; Richard N.L. Andrews, \textit{Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves: A History of American Environmental Policy}, second ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 2-3.
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often crude and self-defeating.”

Prior to the Native land cessions of the common hunting ground in 1887 and 1888, the federal government possessed limited intel regarding the vast area and the groups occupying it. The construction of Fort Assinniboine in 1879 greatly helped make this area legible, but it was not until the Native land cessions in the 1880s and the subsequent influx of white settlers into the area in the 1890s that the federal government could begin to fully extend itself into the area.

Connecting Fort Assinniboine to distant market centers in 1887 with the Great Northern Railway was essential into bringing large-scale white settlement into the area. Not only did the railroad physically carry passengers more efficiently into the general area of the Northern Plains, but it also allowed settlers in the area to be more connected to not only distant U.S. markets but global markets as well. The railroad spiderwebbed its way throughout the United States in the nineteenth century connecting extractive hinterlands to urban refineries and markets. The Great Northern enjoyed the benefits of scientific advances and the surveying afforded by the military presence in northern Montana by constructing its route at extremely low grades which, in turn, provided it with a competitive advantage over its competitors. Low grades meant the Great Northern could charge lower rates, making it an efficient low-cost transport of goods and settlers.

Essential as the Great Northern was in spurring white settlement into the area, however, discipline precedes organization. According to Foucault, the disciplinary machinery “was a procedure…aimed at knowing, mastering and using. Discipline organizes analytical space.”

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8 James Hill was notorious for wanting to build “the best possible line, shortest distance, lowest grades, and least curvature” to maximize profits. See, Ralph W. Hidy, et al., *The Great Northern Railway: A History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 75, 120, 328; see also, Michael P. Malone, *James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); White, *Railroaded*, 391-396.
Assiniboine created the disciplinary conditions for effective organization out of the northern reservation that “eliminate[d] the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage; anti-concentration.” The conditions of discipline and organization that Fort Assiniboine instilled and inscribed into both the inhabitants of the northern reservation and the landscape itself was prerequisite. Indeed, in 1889, the Secretary of War reported that, while “the powerful tribes of savages have been subjugated, disarmed, located, or colonized…it [U.S. military presence in the West] could not be withdrawn without imminent danger to many sections of the western part of our country.” The panoptic nature of Fort Assiniboine laid the groundwork for the precision and efficiency espoused in the Progressive Era. While Fort Assiniboine faded in importance in the Northern Plains around the dawn of the twentieth century due to U.S. involvement in other imperial projects abroad, such as the Spanish–American War and the Philippine–American War, its presence in the late nineteenth century allowed for the area’s commercial development and incorporation into mainstream America in the early twentieth century.

Despite the massive wealth of Montana’s land, its production and subsequent the growth of Montana’s economy was useless without the ability to efficiently link Montana to the larger U.S. economy. By the mid-nineteenth century, Montana and much of the Rocky Mountain West remained formidable terrain, largely isolated from the rest of the nation. Rates of travel from New York City to the Rocky Mountain West took at best five weeks in 1857. Overland routes

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9 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 143.
11 For a map of national rates of travel from New York City in 1830 and 1857 and the role of the railroad in unifying the United States’ regional markets into a national market, see Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 77.
across the mountainous terrain remained both dangerous and inefficient. The upstart of Montana’s economy in the 1860s required a solution that would link Montana to the nation in an efficient and safer manner. Railroads vastly increased rates of travel, carrying capacity of both cargo and people, and, as a result of government subsidies to build the roads, consumed huge tracts of land at cheap rates. Not only did the railroads themselves displace Native peoples in their physical existence, but they expedited the process of large-scale white settlement and capital development into the area as well. In 1887, for instance, *The River Press* noted that “10,000 mutton wethers passed through the doors of Benton en route to the Big Sandy stock yards for shipment over the Manitoba via St. Paul to Chicago.”¹² Thus, the construction of the northern Transcontinental railroad lines—the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883, the Great Northern Railroad in 1887, and Milwaukee Railroad in 1909—sped up the process of overpopulating the West and connected previously impenetrable and isolated regions to the larger national economy.¹³

The construction of Fort Assinniboine in the heart of the northern reservation was essential to opening the vast territory in northern Montana up for white settlement. Ten years after the Fort’s construction, the Great Northern Railway—the United States’ third and northernmost transcontinental railroad—snaked across the Northern Plains from St. Paul, Minnesota to Seattle, Washington. Privately financed by railroad tycoon James J. Hill—regarded as the “Empire Builder”—the Great Northern hoped to connect previously disparate market centers with their resource-producing hinterlands. To do such, the Great Northern engaged in a

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¹³ For a map of American Railways in 1861, see https://transportgeography.org/wp-content/uploads/Map_US_Rail_1861.pdf; for a map of American Railways in 1916—the time of Rocky Boy’s establishment—see https://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/4400/4401/4401.htm; for more on the benefits that the railroad brought to Montana in the 1880s, see also, Sheridan, *Record of Engagements*, 103-104; see also, White, *Railroaded*, xxxvi, xxxviii, 494.
vigorous campaign to spur settlement into the rural Northern Plains along its route. Railroad towns popped up overnight to provide lodging and other amenities to construction teams and rail-weary travelers as the track made its way to completion in Helena in 1887.\textsuperscript{14} Havre, Montana, established in 1893, was one such town, becoming a major depot for the Great Northern, conveniently situated six miles north of Fort Assinniboine.\textsuperscript{15} Havre was a quintessential railroad town in its early days, and the railroad was so vital to the town’s capital development that one might have asked “Where is Havre located?” in the early 1900s, to the reply: “In Jim Hill’s pocket.”\textsuperscript{16} Building the railroad and constructing a townsite next door to the largest military post in the nation was, perhaps, the ultimate hedge against any potential Indian uprising, making Havre an especially attractive place to settle.

The railroad facilitated the transportation of capital. Along with the literal transportation of funds to loan the road’s construction, the road also allowed the transportation of people, goods, and ideas at a faster pace. In order for James J. Hill to finance the western expansion of the Great Northern he required liquid capital. An 1890 newspaper article published in Superior, Wisconsin detailed the cost for “the Pacific extension of the Great Northern from Assinniboine to Puget Sound, which, it is said, will cost $25,000,000.”\textsuperscript{17} Despite this cost, however, large distances allowed for equally large profits, as Fort Benton’s \textit{The River Press}, outlined passenger rates along the line: “From Fort Assinniboine to Fort Belknap, $1.45; Glasgow, $8.05; Milk River, $9; Poplar, $11.55; Buford, $14.50; Williston, $15.60; Minot, $20.40; Devil’s Lake,

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  \item [14] For more on townsite development encouraged by James Hill along the Great Northern’s line, see White, \textit{Railroaded}, 156-161.
  \item [17] “A Good, Healthy Loan,” \textit{Superior Times}, September 13, 1890.
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$25.15; Larimore, $27.55; Grand Forks, $28.65; Crookston, $29.65; Fargo, $31.75; St. Cloud, $38.45; St. Paul or Minneapolis, $40.55.”\textsuperscript{18} These costs of transportation, paired with “Passenger trains leaving Assinniboine daily,” both allowed for and required the transportation of capital. Railroad companies enthusiastically encouraged settlement into the trans-Mississippi West with the Great Northern Railway, perhaps, being the most notorious of the three transcontinental railroads. Railroad propaganda proliferated not only throughout the United States, but internationally as well—especially to Europe—to encourage settlement along their respective lines and, therefore, increase the amount of cargo running on its lines and turn a larger profit. In 1889, the year Montana achieved statehood and two years after the Native land cessions in the common hunting ground, the Great Northern published a periodical describing the recently vacated area. The publication points out that “this interesting country is almost an empire in itself…540 miles in length…and 315 in width.”\textsuperscript{19} The publication continued that “of the government lands still open to the home-seeker, by far the largest tract, and having the most resources, has, until within the past year, been a reservation withheld from settlers.” Advertising the Milk River Valley as “an empire of land,” the Great Northern allowed “the capitalist [to] open a field for profitable investment in land, in stock or in mines.”\textsuperscript{20} The recently vacated Milk River Valley, therefore, presented an opportunity in land that was rapidly decreasing each year as the West became more settled.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, settlers and adventurers could hitch a ride on a steamboat from Buffalo, New York to Duluth, Minnesota and take a train directly to Grand

\textsuperscript{18} “Manitoba Local Passenger Rates,” \textit{The River Press}, September 28, 1887.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{The Great Reservation: 3024 Miles of Steel Track in Minnesota, Dakota and Montana, Direct and Principal Line from St. Paul, Minneapolis, Duluth and the East to Chinook (Dawes), Benton, Great Falls, Helena, Butte and the Pacific Coast} (Chicago: Poole Bros., 1889), 5.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{The Great Reservation}, 23-31.
Forks, North Dakota, or ride a connecting route down to St. Paul, Minnesota destined for Seattle, Washington. In this way, as one Great Northern publication explained, “Branches of the Great Northern like giant fingers gather from this goodly land a multitude of varied products, and aided by connecting steamer lines carry them east to the older States, to England and Europe; and west to the new American colonies, to China, Japan, and the growing markets of the wide Orient.”

This connection could, therefore, carry newly arrived immigrants on the East Coast to the Midwest or beyond in order to become the prosperous and independent members of the United States that the railways promised. According to the railway company, at the turn of the century the Great Northern “traverse[d] a transcontinental belt possible of continuous settlement.”

Another Great Northern publication regarded this stretch of land as “a belt of States pulsating with life and growing under the spur of steam and electricity.” Traversing the largest and most recently available tract of land in the United States, the Great Northern saw enormous profits to be made along its line, especially in the Milk River Valley.

The Milk River Valley was the jewel in the crown of white settlement along the International Boundary. Edenic portraits of the region described that “many settlers are locating [in the Milk River Valley], and as irrigation means assured harvests, all are prosperous and rapidly becoming independent…The Milk River Valley is destined to be one of the richest and best settled agricultural districts of Montana.” Another periodical declared that “The Northwest knows nothing of the frontier life that lasted for a generation in the valley of Mississippi before the era of railways. Towns and cities spring up like magic in the new West.”

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21 Across America Via The “Great Northern” (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1899). For this specific quote, see page 41.
22 Across America, 64.
23 Valley, Plain and Peak: Scenes on the Line of the Great Northern Railway (St. Paul: Office of General Passenger and Ticket Agent, 1894), 5.
24 Across America, 96-97.
25 Valley, Plain and Peak, 30.
cities were not springing up along the new track through magic; rather, this “new West” and its rapid development was a direct result of the order and organization that Fort Assinniboine etched into the Northern Plains during the 1870s and 1880s, allowing for the region’s rapid development.

Railroads were not alone in their depictions of northern Montana as a lucrative place of settlement. Newspapers and homesteading publications were likewise laudatory of the region’s rich prospects. The American writer Charles Dudley Warner, in his description of the Milk River Valley in 1890, pronounced the region as “an empire of excellent land, ready for the plough and the wheat-sower.”26 In 1898, *The Congregationalist* put forth an article titled “In the Track of Empire,” which described the territory along the Great Northern’s line as a veritable breadbasket, arguing that “it [wheat] must always remain an article of import…raised in America’s great Northwest” and shipped globally, especially to Asia, where grain consumption was growing in popularity.27 Continuing the Edenic portrait of the Milk River Valley, *The Havre Herald* positioned a header atop its January 25, 1907 issue reading “The Milk River Valley Is the Settler’s Arcadia,” referring to a pastoral paradise in Greek legend.28 Railroad publications, newspapers, and other writings suggested that the Milk River Valley, perhaps more so than any other region in the United States at the turn of the century, was an incredibly lucrative opportunity that, when fully developed, would feed America’s imperial ambitions.

Simon Pepin, a French-Canadian rancher, entrepreneur, and early patriarch of Havre, Montana, serves as an example for the sheer size and natural wealth the Milk River Valley afforded. Described in his 1914 eulogy as “the cattle king and capitalist of northern Montana,”

27 “In the Track of Empire,” *The Congregationalist*, June 28, 1898.
Pepin arrived in what became Montana Territory in the early 1860s as a teamster for the Diamond R Freighting Company.29 The young Pepin learned the value of transporting goods and commodities throughout the sparsely populated Montana Territory during the 1860s and 1870s, purchasing his first cattle herd by the mid-1870s. Pepin utilized his early experience in transporting goods with the arrival of troops at Fort Assiniboine in the late-1870s, where his experience provided him with a near-monopoly in shipping supplies to the garrison at Fort Assiniboine, managing the post store, and supplying the troops with beef. By the late-1880s, Simon Pepin had established a large ranching outfit north of the Milk River in what would become Hill County. Indeed, by 1890 a large portion of land in the Milk River Valley and extending southward into the Judith Basin contained “great herds of cattle [were] raised by Government contractors, who suppl[ied] the posts with beef.”30 The Great Northern Railroad’s arrival at Fort Assiniboine in the late-1880s solidified the financial futures of both Pepin and the town that would become Havre, Montana. One of the founders of Havre, Pepin financed the development of Havre with both capital and land, and owned numerous Havre businesses outright, leading the Havre Plaindealer to estimate that “Simon Pepin is probably the largest owner of real estate and city property in Hill County.” At the time of Pepin’s death on November 8, 1914, his estate was valued at one million dollars in total, with “$350,000 in cattle and horses and the rights to more than fifty thousand acres of land in Montana and Alberta.”31

While treaties marked the beginnings of white forays into Native territory, subsequent processes of more permanent white settlement soon followed, expediting the process of Native

displacement. The Homestead Act of 1862, which allowed white settlers to purchase 160 acres for $1.25, opened up new lands and settlement opportunities in the West. The Great American Desert, however, as the Northwestern Plains had come to be known due to its aridity, was difficult land to work for a profit, and farmers required more land than that required east of the 100th meridian, which typically received substantially more annual rainfall. Thus, in 1909 the Enlarged Homestead Act was passed, amending the original Act and doubling the acreage to 320 acres for a white settler to “facilitate the development of the least populous parts of the nation.”\textsuperscript{32} These massive plots of cheap land, along with increased rainfall in the region during the first two decades of the twentieth century, created a rush of migration into the Rocky Mountain West, including Montana.\textsuperscript{33}

U.S. Census data indicates the rapid growth of white settlement in Montana. Montana Territory’s population in 1870 numbered roughly 20,595; Montana’s population in 1920 numbered almost 549,000 inhabitants, marking an increase of over 25 times in just a half century. Census data also indicates the number and size of farms over this 50-year period. Montana Territory, in 1870, had roughly 851 operating farms on 139,537 acres with the average farm cultivating 164 acres. By 1920, Montana had 57,677 operating farms on over 35 million acres—over one-third of the state’s total area of 93 million acres, or slightly larger than New York state’s total area—with the average acreage per farm equaling over 600 acres and over 30


\textsuperscript{33} The massive land rushes in Montana can be difficult to appreciate at face value due to the sheer number of migrants. However, “in one three-week period early in 1916, the GN carried 3,000 people with 600 cars of immigrant movables to Montana; in 1917, the federal land office at Havre listed 7,500 entries, more than twice the number for 1912,” see Hidy, et al., The Great Northern, 150; see also Great Northern Railway, Railway Review, April 21, 1917.

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percent of Montana farms being 500 acres or more.\textsuperscript{34} Put differently, Montana’s rural population increased 55.3 percent from 1910 to 1920, while the national average for the same period was 3.2 percent. From 1910 to 1920, Montana put another 21,525,053 acres to the plow, indicating a decennial surge of 158.9 percent and the largest such increase in the nation. Montana was also the only state during this period—which is characterized as a period of rapid urbanization—whose rural portion of its total population increased, doing so by over 4 percent, while the rural portion of the United States as a whole decreased by 6 percent.\textsuperscript{35} This is last statistic is extremely significant: while the rest of the United States was steadily moving out of the country and into cities, Montana was the only state whose total population continued becoming more rural.

The massive influx of white settlers, who engaged in primarily extractive livelihoods in either mining, lumbering, or farming, created increased competition for natural resources, between both Natives and whites and between wild game and domesticated livestock.\textsuperscript{36} Agricultural census data provides useful statistical valuations regarding the agricultural expansion into both the territory of Montana and Choteau County, more specifically.\textsuperscript{37} In 1870, the county reported only 113 head of all livestock, including horses, mules, milk cows, oxen, cattle, and sheep. These numbers jumped to 20,000 head of cattle and approximately 4,000 head of sheep in 1880, with 84 farms counted in Choteau County. In 1890, Choteau counted 103,236


\textsuperscript{36} Estimates for cattle lost in Choteau County in 1887 was between 15 and 25 percent, representing a loss of between 11,513 and 19,188 head, respectively. The northern Plains were quickly becoming overcrowded with livestock during the late 1880s, resulting in more diseases and weaker animals due to less food, resulting in starvation and higher death tolls during harsh winters. “Estimates of Losses on the Range,” \textit{Maine Farmer}, June 16, 1887; Garrett Hardin also discusses this idea of the finite resources in the “commons,” which leads to both ecological and economic ruin, Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” 1244; for more on the cattle industry in the 1880s, see Specht, \textit{Red Meat Republic}, 106-115, 145-151.

\textsuperscript{37} Choteau County, during this period, was very large and contained much of what is today Hill and Blaine Counties.
cattle and 216,581 sheep, good enough for second and third most-productive county in Montana for cattle and sheep, respectively. During this period, while sheep increased at a rate of about 10 times in the entire state of Montana, sheep in Choteau County increased 54 times. From 1890 to 1900, the number of farms in the county rose to 762; by 1910, 1,818 farms dotted Choteau County with cattle climbing to 83,509 head, and sheep skyrocketing to 946,393.\textsuperscript{38} By 1902, one passenger aboard the Great Northern described the scene in northern Montana as a “seemingly never-ending succession of ranches, herds of stock of all kinds,” and estimated that “the United States reports tell us there are only 37,000,000 cattle in this country, but I am sure that I saw more than this number in one day from the car window.”\textsuperscript{39}

The Montana Territory, in 1870, contained 36,788 and 2,024 head of cattle and sheep, respectively. By 1880, this number jumped to 172,387 head of cattle and 184,277 sheep; this number skyrocketed by 1890, with 691,898 cattle and 1,859,616 sheep in the new state.\textsuperscript{40} This increased competition for resources marked the decline—and near extinction—of many of the Northern Plains’ most physically nourishing creatures, such as the bison. The bison, for example, also held high reverence among many Native cultures on the Northern Plains due to its utility, with its near extinction resulting in a state of physical and spiritual starvation for many Natives.

The expansion of agriculture in Montana—most rapidly in the 1910s—is perhaps no better illustrated than through the amount of mortgage debt accrued by farmers. Farmers took loans to purchase newer equipment and expand their farming operations during an Age of Plenty in Montana agriculture when production was at its peak and grain prices were high. The Great

\textsuperscript{40} United States, Department of Agriculture, \textit{Census of Agriculture, 1890} (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890).
American Desert appeared to have been finally tamed by dry-farming practices and advanced irrigation technologies, with the advantage of increased rainfall during this period as well. There were 3,990 Montana farmers reporting debt in 1910, with the state’s total farming debt equaling over $10 million; by 1920 there were 21,244 farmers reporting debt, with the state’s total farm debt skyrocketing to almost $78 million in just ten years. Farm debt, therefore, illustrates the rapid expansion of agriculture in Montana during the 1910s, as farmers both fledgling and established took the opportunity to either take up farming in Montana with the Enlarged Homestead Act or to expand their already large operations. Montana’s exponential agricultural expansion, which began in the 1870s and peaked in the 1910s, ultimately came to a halt by the early 1920s, throwing Montana into an agricultural depression that rocked the state’s economy for years before the stock market crash of 1929.41

The construction of Fort Assinniboine and the Great Northern Railroad in the Northern Plains made possible the region’s integration into the global marketplace. Some scholars have described this process through the influence of a modern world-system. In this system, which seeks to incorporate resource-rich hinterlands into the core production centers, “a powerful state apparatus, a diversified workforce, and mechanisms meant to ensure the accretion of wealth in private hands” were paramount.42 By the late 1800s, the Northern Plains possessed all three criteria: the powerful state apparatus was that of discipline and state oversight into the area provided by Fort Assinniboine; the arrival of the Great Northern Railway ensured a diverse workforce with which to populate the region; and the organizational ideology driving

Progressive Era conservatism put into place the calculated mechanisms necessary in order to make the region both environmentally and socially welcoming to the accretion of private wealth.

Despite its role in opening north-central Montana to white settlement, the viability of maintaining Fort Assinniboine as a military post became a hotly debated topic after the turn of the century. A 1905 article, published in The Columbian detailed “the almost total failure of a suitable water supply for the troops stationed [at Fort Assinniboine].” The paper went on, explaining that “if water has to be shipped to the post for the men, the war department, it is said will not be slow to order a change. There are other posts in the Department of the Dakotas, where the water supply is abundant, although climactic conditions vary.”

The issue of water scarcity, of course, is not singular to north-central Montana, but one that is epidemic to much of the trans-Mississippi West.

Compounding initial reports of water scarcity at the Fort, the following year, in 1906, a tornado hit Havre, Montana. Reported in The Columbian, the newspaper estimated that the tornado caused $20,000 of damage, or over $500,000 of damage in today’s money. The article continued that “Meager news accounts from Fort Assinniboine tell of great destruction wrought there by the tornado.” The paper then went into detail regarding the destruction: “Several large buildings went down. Several thousand feet of the track of the Great Northern railway…have been washed out. Engineers report that the territory between Havre and Glasgow resembles a sea…A report says that both of the reservoirs at Fort Assinniboine burst and that the quarters of the soldiers are being flooded.”

The already evident scarcity of potable water, combined with the destruction of the tornado, which resulted in extensive flooding and further water

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44 The Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that 2019 prices are 2,757.87% higher than prices in 1906. For this information, see https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1906?amount=20000.
45 “Tornado Hit Havre, Mont.,” The Columbian, June 16, 1906.
contamination from debris and silt, led many to question whether or not Assinniboine could or should have been maintained.

The citizens of Havre were adamant about retaining the fort as an operating military post. For tangible economic reasons, Havre citizens saw the fort as a source of jobs, safety, and stability. The *Havre Herald* published an article in 1907, advocating for the retention of the fort in its military capacity. According to the paper, “If adaptability, largeness of reservation and economy are the objects to be considered in the selection of brigade posts, Fort Assinniboine is deserving of becoming the first choice.” Not only was Assinniboine large but, as the paper argued, “Fort Assinniboine…[was] the largest owned by the government, its area being given as 220,000 acres, the next reservations in size are stated to be Fort Wingate, 83,200 and Fort Sill, 77,800.” Fort Assinniboine, “with its extensive reservation of over 343 square miles,” the paper concluded, was the clear choice for a brigade post due to its size and ability to maneuver large bodies of troops.46

The citizens of Havre sought to maintain Fort Assinniboine as an active military post for a few reasons. First, and most obviously, is the immediate economic impact that the Fort’s retention would have on nearby Havre; soldiers at the Fort were potential patrons for all of the best that Havre had to offer. Moreover, the security and stability of the largest military Fort operating in the background of Havre would entice further settlement, allowing Havre to grow via settlers arriving off of the Great Northern Railroad and injecting their capital into Havre’s economy.

The economic impact of Fort Assinniboine, which was ruled to be retained in 1908—only one year before the passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act—was well-understood by Havre

residents as immediate. The Havre Herald published an article in 1908, which argued that “The re-opening of the post means increased business for every merchant, saloon, and restaurant and business firm in Havre, not only from the payroll of the soldiers and officers, but from a large amount of extra employed there.” Furthermore, Fort Assinniboine, which could be itself be regarded as a self-contained town, meant that Havre citizens had a dependable market in which to sell their farm products.\textsuperscript{47} As the paper continued, “It means a market for the hay and grain of the Milk River valley which has not moved as rapidly and at as good prices this year owing to the mild winter and the depressed condition in Butte and Anaconda.” Moreover, “It means thousands of dollars annually brought into the city by visitors dropping off to view the post and reservation.”\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, the Fort was utilized in advertisement for the Great Northern Railway to entice travelers to ride its scenic road. For instance, the Great Northern, perhaps the most active promoter of all the of transcontinental railroads, published a promotional book in 1894 titled Valley, Plain and Peak: Scenes on the Line of the Great Northern Railway, which highlighted major stops along the Great Northern route from the Twin Cities to Seattle, including a page dedicated to Fort Assinniboine.\textsuperscript{49}

**Imperial Remnants: Repurposing Fort Assinniboine**

In 1896, a group of affluent and influential New Englanders gathered for their annual meeting at the Lake Mohonk Mountain House in New York state to discuss the philanthropic needs of America’s dependents, especially its Native wards. The goal of the Friends of the Indian was to assist Native Americans by “letting go of the Indian of romance, and learning what the

\textsuperscript{47} For the idea of Fort Assinniboine operating as a self-contained town, see Hardeman, “Brick Strong Hold of the Border,” 58.

\textsuperscript{48} “Fort Assinniboine Fight Won and Post Will Be Retained,” The Havre Herald, March 13, 1908.

\textsuperscript{49} F.I. Whitney, Valley, Plain and Peak: Scenes on the Line of the Great Northern Railway (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1894), 36.
real Indian is and how to help him to intelligent citizenship, to civilization, and to Christianization. “To bring him out of savagery into citizenship,” the philanthropists agreed, “we must make the Indian more intelligently selfish…We need to awaken in him wants.” The communal lifestyle that many Natives enjoyed prior to contact with whites was anathema to American industrial capitalism and a hindrance to the civilizing process. Instead, “the desire for property of his own may become an intense educating force…Discontent with the teepee and the starving rations of the Indian camp in winter is needed to get the Indian out of the blanket and into trousers,—and trousers with a pocket in them, and with a pocket that aches to be filled with dollars!”

Military occupation and the expansion of white settlement made traditional modes of economic independence increasingly difficult for Natives to maintain. Dispossessed by the mid-1880s, Native peoples in Wisconsin and Minnesota—mostly Chippewas in Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota and Dakotas in central and western Minnesota—moved westward in response to land cessions and white settlement beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The first land cession treaty in the area occurred in 1805 when the Dakota ceded one hundred thousand acres of land at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers—land upon which Minneapolis and St. Paul are now located. This treaty, along with increasing white settlement in the area, subsequent land-cession treaties, and the vast depletion of game in the region from overhunting during the fur trade and overpopulation, led to increasing intertribal

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aggression and competition for resources. Therefore, various bands of Chippewas pushed westward into Dakota lands, ultimately pushing the Dakota groups to the far western edges of Minnesota in order to acquire more plentiful resources and escape the massive droves of white settlement. White encroachment into the Great Lakes Region, therefore, created a domino effect of displacement in the area; displaced by white settlers, desperate Native groups oftentimes displaced other Natives in order to survive, and so on.⁵³

Due to almost a century of permanent settlements by whites in the Great Lakes region, by the 1880s the Chippewa peoples in Minnesota began experiencing the all-too-familiar symptoms of white encroachment and continued moving westward. With the onset of the reservation system in Wisconsin and Minnesota, disparate groups of Chippewa peoples aligned themselves under a leader, Asiniiwin, or Stone Child, mistranslated into English as Rocky Boy. Seeing their relatives resigned to the reservation system, Rocky Boy and his people were left with a decision: confine themselves to a reservation or continue moving westward in hopes of escaping white presence and finding more bountiful game. Rocky Boy decided to pursue the latter course of action, moving through North Dakota and past the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewas into Montana. Some uncertainty exists concerning exactly when Rocky Boy and his people arrived in Montana. A Chippewa man named Ah sin e we nee, or Stone Man, aged 32, appeared as a

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⁵³ Between 1805 and 1858, the Great Lakes Region transformed from an area of mostly Native groups and traders into areas of major white settlement, largely due to treaties, which allotted different Native groups certain concrete boundaries. Illinois existed as a territory from 1809 to 1818, achieving statehood in 1818. Wisconsin existed as a part of the Illinois Territory from 1809 to 1818, after which it became a part of the Michigan Territory from 1818 to 1836, and as the Wisconsin Territory from 1836 to 1848, when it finally achieved statehood in 1848. Portions of Eastern Minnesota were included in the Wisconsin Territory from 1836 to 1848, after which the Minnesota Territory existed from 1849 to 1858, achieving statehood in 1858. This half century marked a period of massive white migration into the Great Lakes Region. For instance, Chicago, settled by whites in 1833, was the 92nd largest city in the United States in 1840 with a population of 4,470. By 1850, Chicago was the 24th largest city in the United States with a population of 29,963. For Chicago census information, see https://www.census.gov; see also William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 28-32, 52; for white migration into and settlement of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, see also Bethel Saler, *The Settlers’ Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in America’s Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).
signatory on a treaty signed at Red Lake, Minnesota in 1889. It is not possible to be entirely certain if this was Rocky Boy, but the name and the age of Stone Man corroborates with Rocky Boy and the approximate age that he would have been in 1889. It is unknown whether Rocky Boy had gone to Montana prior to 1889 or not.\textsuperscript{54} At the latest, however, Rocky Boy and his people appear to have arrived in Montana no later than 1897, as a 1902 letter from A.C. Tonner, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the time, to E.A. Hitchcock, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, states that “these Indians are Chippewas whose ancestors left Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin and came to Montana some 5 years ago.”\textsuperscript{55} Therefore, although there is no explicit dating of Rocky Boy’s movement into Montana, it is, however, possible to place Rocky Boy’s permanent settlement into Montana sometime between 1889 and 1897.

After living on the outskirts of established white settlements for a few years as “Wandering Indians,” Rocky Boy’s group sought a more independent and self-sufficient way of life. Grown weary of living off the ever-decreasing fat of the land due to agricultural settlement and overhunting, Rocky Boy recognized that his people needed to adapt to changing circumstances by practicing settled agriculture in order to survive. In 1902, with the aid of John W. Jones, Esq., he implored President Theodore Roosevelt “to secure land from this Government upon which to make homes for himself and his people.” After living through the Treaty Era and

\textsuperscript{54} For the 1889 Red Lake Treaty, see, US Congress, House, \textit{Chippewa Indians in Minnesota. Message from the President of the United States, transmitting a communication from the Secretary of the Interior relative to the Chippewa Indians in the State of Minnesota. March 6, 1890. – Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs, HR Exec. Doc. 247. 51st Cong., 1st sess., March 6, 1890. It is unclear if Rocky Boy had arrived in Montana prior to 1889 or not. Documents vary on dating Chippewa expansion into Montana, but by the mid-1800s at latest a band of Chippewa had settled at Turtle Mountain in North Dakota, so it is possible that some Chippewa continued into Montana around this time. One such source is the \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended in June 30, 1916}, which states that “Over 60 years ago a band of Chippewa left Wisconsin to hunt buffalo and finally reached Montana.”

\textsuperscript{55} Correspondence from A.C. Tonner to E.A. Hitchcock, 26 April 1902, MSS 746 Series II Box 2, 1897-1902, Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy’s Reservation Water Resources Department Water Rights Settlement Records, 1832-2002, Mansfield Library Archives.
the false promises that many of those treaties entailed, Rocky Boy sought permanent land—land that would be guaranteed from white intrusion. In another letter on behalf of Rocky Boy, Jones wrote to E.A. Hitchcock that “they [Rocky Boy’s people] do not feel like doing anything upon the land either surveyed or unsurveyed [sic], or subject to homestead entry, if after so locating and improving the land they will lose the efforts of their toil.”56 Rocky Boy and his people, by the late nineteenth century, were familiar with the broken agreements that characterized Native treaty-making with whites and, therefore, sought guarantees that any land upon which they were to settle would be undeniably and indefinitely theirs.

Rocky Boy desired for his people to possess land not only to become economically stable but also to break the paternalistic dependence that they had developed with the U.S. government. As landless wanderers, Rocky Boy’s people lived almost exclusively off of government subsidies, donations from the white cities that they camped around, or digging through dumps and slaughterhouse offal to survive.57 The Chippewa, Cree, and Métis sought to break their reliance on white charity and become self-sustaining and self-determining by possessing land to cultivate and ranch, as had many white settlers sought during the agricultural boom of early twentieth century Montana. Jones noted that “if given the opportunity for each Indian to secure the same amount of land that is tilliable [sic] and that a white settler can secure, he and his people can and will be able to support themselves from their own labor.” Jones presents Rocky Boy and his people as hearty and industrious, yearning to be able to provide for themselves and, therefore, live independently. Furthermore, Jones noted: “They first desire assurance that the land and what ever [sic] improvements they may place thereon may not be taken from them…

57 Anaconda Standard, October 15, 1909.
They were particularly desirous of having the privilege of locating upon some land… near St. Mary’s Lake, Montana.”\(^5^8\) Located within present-day Glacier National Park, a reservation within proximity of Saint Mary Lake would have provided rich flora and fauna, as well as more fertile agricultural terrain. Thus, in 1902 Rocky Boy and his people embarked on over a decade-long struggle to finally achieve their desires of land protected from white incursion.

Rocky Boy, despite his passion and vigor for his peoples’ cause, could not achieve federal recognition and tribal lands without outside assistance. Thus, from 1902 to 1916, Rocky Boy would bring in a variety of people to help him in his cause. Perhaps the most vigorous supporter of Rocky Boy’s desires was Frank Bird Linderman, an ethnographer. Linderman proved relentless in his letters to newspaper editors, Bureau of Indian Affairs officials, and state and federal government officials, in his advocacy for Rocky Boy’s people. The esteem with which not only the landless Indians held Linderman for his advocacy, but also other Native groups with reservations, speaks to the relationship that he had forged with many of these different Native peoples. Many letters both to and from Linderman in correspondence with influential Chippewa or Cree leaders are often signed “Friend” or “Brother.” Moreover, the content within many of these letters illustrates that many Native people regarded Linderman as someone to whom they could confide in and would hold their best wishes at heart. Many letters to Linderman from influential Native leaders highlight the destitution within the group, appealing to Linderman to provide them with more rations, as well as solve personal disputes, such as at least one instance of domestic abuse.\(^5^9\) Confiding in such personal tribal matters, such

\(^{58}\) Correspondence from John W. Jones, Esq., to E.A. Hitchcock, 12 May 1902, MSS 746 Series II Box 2, 1897-1902, Water Rights Settlement Records, 1832-2002, Mansfield Library Archives.

\(^{59}\) Correspondence from “Petitioner” to Frank B. Linderman, 9 March 1915, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 18 [“Little Bear”], Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
as an instance of domestic abuse within the tribe, reveals the close relationship that Linderman had developed with Rocky Boy and his people over the years.

Rocky Boy’s cast of advocates consisted of white allies who held considerable political influence as well. Former Montana Senator Paris Gibson seemed to have felt a moral or ethical obligation of the United States government to provide Rocky Boy’s people with just recompense. Gibson and Linderman were in correspondence during the pre-reservation years as advocates for Rocky Boy’s people. In a 1913 letter, Gibson wrote Linderman revealing his profound sentiment that “There is every reason under Heaven why the government should render assistance to these poor starving Indians.” 60 1913 was an especially dire year for Rocky Boy’s people, one that stands out in a two decade-long period of landlessness and poverty. Conditions were so dire in 1913 that Rocky Boy begged Linderman to “exert yourself on our behalf… erge [sic] government to sent [sic] beef and other vituals [sic] to these starving Chippewas here.” Indeed, the winter of 1913 saw Rocky Boy go to such lengths that, as one letter to Linderman states, he fed his people with “two dead horses, that were thrown away at Browning dump.” 61 The graphic example of procuring thrown out horse corpses for nourishment reveals the desperate state of affairs that Rocky Boy and his people found themselves in.

Although newspaper periodicals played a critical role in bringing compassionate Montanans into Rocky Boy’s cause, they also reveal contemporary public perception regarding Native people. Often described as a “little band of vagrants” or “lazy itinerants,” the wandering Indians of Montana received considerable attention, reflected by the innumerable articles

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60 Correspondence from Paris Gibson to Frank B. Linderman, 11 January 1913, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 10, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives; Correspondence from Paris Gibson to Frank B. Linderman, 21 January 1913, Frank Bird Linderman Papers.
61 Correspondence from Rocky Boy to Frank B. Linderman, 6 January 1913, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 24, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives; Correspondence from Rocky Boy to Frank B. Linderman, 16 Jan. 1913, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 24, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
pertaining to Rocky Boy and his people. These articles brought to the imagination both popular stereotypes and affirmation that forcing civilization upon the Indians was good for the Indians. Newspaper editors utilized and often glorified well-known events, such as the Trail of Tears, and other such imagery of the supposedly savage Indian in juxtaposition with the benefits of civilization in efforts to convince their audience that Native traditions were an impediment to progress.

Newspaper editors portrayed non-reservation, wandering Indians as a continuation of the “Indian problem” that had plagued their forefathers. Such paternalistic perspectives are illustrated in an article about the proposed reservation headlined “GOOD RIDDANCE TO THEM” published in the Anaconda Standard in 1909. The Standard article began with the hopeful outlook that “Anaconda, Butte, and Helena will soon be rid of Rocky Boy and his vagrant band of Indians—perhaps,” before continuing on to critique the sympathy garnered for their cause. To the editors, this sympathy was conjured by romanticizing Rocky Boy’s people, “picturing them in the public prints as a sort of lost tribe of Israel, who by some hocus pocus of the law had been robbed of their birthright.” Instead, the paper characterized the group as “a conglomeration of outcasts and homeless Indians,” clinging to their savage ways of life. Such savage ways of life, the paper asserted, similarly afflicted the South after Jackson’s forced removals in the 1830s, and the paper equated Native traditional ways of life to savagery providing harbor for “murderers and other outlaws, fleeing from justice,” as well as “runaway negro slaves.” The article closed with saying that “Chief Rocky Boy and his motley band are only a western expression of a familiar and vexatious problem.” Therefore, by positioning Rocky Boy and his people as “savages” who were driven out of their homelands and forcefully civilized under the administration of Andrew Jackson, the Anaconda Standard made Rocky Boy’s people
an unassimilable Other, with the only true remedy being forced civilization or extirpation. The dominant narrative surrounding the landless and wandering Indians in Montana was that they were lazy vagrants, who wanted to live off of the welfare and goodwill of pitiful whites.

The anguish of Rocky Boy’s people and their neglect by the U.S. government did not abate following the winter of 1913. For his part, Linderman worked tirelessly to ensure that Rocky Boy’s people received the basic necessities of living and the rations that they were promised. By 1916, Linderman began growing weary of the hollow promises of government assistance to Rocky Boy’s group, berating government officials’ indifference toward Native suffering. As Linderman explained to Senator Henry L. Myers, “Mr. Lane [U.S. Secretary of the Interior, 1913-1920] promised me many things, as did Mr. Cato Sells [Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1913-1921], but nothing of permanent good has come through these promises. At times these Indians are given insufficient rations and at other times none at all.”

Quite simply, “Promises will not fill bellies” and the U.S. government had theretofore provided Rocky Boy’s people with little more than empty promises and irregular, insufficient rations. As one contemporary writer plainly stated, “They are accorded just one privilege in this land that belonged to their forefathers, and that is to die of hunger.”

Established in 1916, a few months after Rocky Boy’s death, the aptly named Rocky Boy’s Reservation had finally been established by an Act of Congress after more than a decade of struggle. To both Natives and whites, the reservation came as a welcome sign of relief. For the Chippewa, Cree, and Métis, they could finally work toward independence and self-sovereignty;

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63 Correspondence from Frank B. Linderman to Henry L. Myers, 25 January 1916, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 19, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
64 Ibid.
for many whites, the “landless Indians,” who had lived on the outskirts of their cities, finally had a home far away from theirs. In the 1902 letter to President Roosevelt, Rocky Boy had expressed interest in being placed somewhere near Saint Mary Lake – fertile ground for hunting, fishing, and growing. However, that was not where Rocky Boy’s people had ended up; instead, they were placed upon the abandoned Fort Assiniboine Military Reservation, on the Hi-Line near Havre. This land had been criticized by former Senator Paris Gibson as in 1913 as “not the proper place for the location of Rocky Boy’s band. If they are placed on that ground they will be found as constant beggars around the shops of the town of Havre.” Gibson’s critique of the terrain upon which Fort Assiniboine was located, which is among scores of other such analyses echoing the same analysis, reveals that the land chosen to locate Rocky Boy and his people was not suitable for agricultural development. The U.S. government’s indifference to these concerns suggests that they sought the easiest solution to remove the Natives from sullying white cities with little regard to the Natives’ future prosperity.

Logistical analysis of these critiques regarding the military reservation’s terrain reveals the fallibility of much of the land therein. Indeed, the Fort Assiniboine Military Reservation was not the proper location to place fledgling farmers and ranchers, let alone experienced ones. However, it was convenient—the government possessed a large tract of land that was of no use and unsuitable for white settlement. Upon learning of the government’s desire to place Rocky Boy’s people there, Linderman expediently requested the land to be surveyed. Upon being surveyed, Linderman learned that that the proposed townships included in Rocky Boy’s reservation-to-be possessed altitudes of over 6000 feet, while a 10,000-acre portion of an adjacent township, withheld from inclusion into the reservation, possessed land at lower altitudes.

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66 Correspondence from Paris Gibson to Frank B. Linderman, 21 January 1913, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 10, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives; see also,
and more fertile land along the Beaver Creek. This 10,000-acre tract, despite being some of the most fertile in the area, was, instead, withheld to create Beaver Creek Park, which, as its website boasts, is “the largest county park in the nation.” Linderman pleaded with government officials, including Myers, to advocate for this area to be included in the reservation arguing that “One more township more would not ruin Havre’s camping ground, and when one considers parks set aside for pleasure, bordering on land whereon people are starving, he is apt to lose his appetite for parks in general.” On the land to be included in the reservation, Linderman provided a few rhetorical barbs in his critique asking that, since “there is scarcely any tillable land, and the question is going to be raised thousands of times in the future, - ‘Why don’t these people raise bananas?’” In his summation, “No white man could take 160 acres of that land and make a living,” and, in a subsequent letter, “If we give them nothing but stony hills how can we expect results that will satisfy the white man?... we can afford to buy hay to feed starving deer and elk, but we refuse to give anything like a home to these people, whom we have robbed.”

Linderman’s contemptuous retort to government officials, illustrating the unfavorable agricultural conditions of the Fort Assiniboine area, challenged the U.S. government: either it would refuse to see Rocky Boy’s people as equal to white men or it would find the reason in Linderman’s claims and increase the size of the reservation. The U.S. government decided to locate Rocky Boy and his people on the “stony hills,” with marginal increases in size.

Along with its seemingly inadequate agricultural prospects for a people determined to be farmers, there was also the concern of the reservation’s proximity to Havre. Residents of Havre

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68 Correspondence from Linderman to Myers, 26 January 1916, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 19, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
69 Ibid; Correspondence from Linderman to Myers, 5 February 1916, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 19, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
appear to have been the only major detractors of Rocky Boy’s placement at Fort Assiniboine. The Havre Plaindealer, in a 1913 article, labeled Rocky Boy and his people as “trifling, lazy, renegade Chippewa Indians… human scavengers,” warning the government that if located at Fort Assiniboine, “they would inevitably become a charge upon the bounty and charity of the local people [of Havre]. There is no earthly reason why these people should be sluffed [sic] off by the government on Havre.”

Havre’s residents’ discontent with the prospect of having Natives in their proximity was certainly racially motivated; however, their discontent goes beyond simple racial prejudice. Montana agriculture was booming in 1913, and sectioning off a large portion of land outside of Havre would, according to its residents, cripple Havre’s growing economy by taking land off the tax rolls and give it to Native “scavengers” instead of wealthy white agriculturalists. However, because of the land’s poor agricultural prospects, these remarks echoed earlier white concerns of Native’s inefficient and irresponsible land usage, justifying Native dispossession and placement upon marginal lands.

Concerns for the proximity of Havre and its residents took many different guises from the well-being of Havre’s economy to the well-being of Rocky Boy’s people. Paris Gibson, in a letter to Linderman, noted that Senator Joseph M. Dixon expressed concern for Havre’s proximity to the Natives, arguing that “the buildings at Fort Assinniboine are not suitable for these Indians and he also believes that Assinniboine is too near the whiskey shops of Havre.” Senator Dixon, therefore, shaped the primary issue not as that of Havre’s well-being, but for the well-being of the Natives themselves. With this stance, Senator Dixon positioned himself as an

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71 Havre Plaindealer, January 11, 1913; March 15, 1913.
72 Martha Harroun Foster, We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 217.
73 Correspondence from P. Gibson to Linderman, 21 January 1913, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 10, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
ally to Rocky Boy’s group, while simultaneously advocating for their continued landlessness. Indeed, it appears as though alcoholism had become for Rocky Boy’s people—as with many other Native groups—a prominent social ill. There are many different reasons for this, not least of which being the destitute condition of many Native groups and the escape from reality that alcohol offered them. Little Bear and Rocky Boy, leaders of the landless groups, also appear to have taken a liking to alcohol, with a letter from Linderman “wish[ing] you [Rocky Boy and Little Bear] would not drink whiskey. I want you to do your share toward building houses when they ask you to work. I want you to show that you are trying to do right always.”74 Although Linderman’s concern was for his friends’ personal well-being and the motivation of acquiring a home for them, the same concern is not likely not shared by other white politicians. For Dixon and others, the issue of alcoholism was not for the well-being of Natives for their own sake; rather, it was a paternalistic reasoning reinforced by Native stereotypes, a rationale which, if heeded, would have resulted in yet another setback close to the finish line for Rocky Boy’s group.

Letters to Native leaders from Linderman indicate that Rocky Boy’s people, Linderman, and other non-government actors had, ultimately, little impact on the decision as to where the reservation should be established. In a 1915 letter from Linderman to Rocky Boy, Linderman related to Rocky Boy that “we will have to take the townships that the government will give us and be satisfied.”75 However, these letters also indicate that Rocky Boy and his advocates did have some degree of success in determining the size of the reservation. A 1916 letter from Linderman to Rocky Boy points out that “They [government officials] started to give us only the

74 Correspondence from Linderman to Little Bear and Rocky Boy, 30 March 1916, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 24, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
75 Correspondence from Linderman to Rocky Boy, 13 May 1915, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 24, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
two townships that are very rough, but they have promised me now that they will give us the other one also. I have done my best.”

After over a decade of appeals to the US government, which proved reluctant in granting even the marginal Fort Assiniboine lands, Rocky Boy’s people finally had land to call their own.

Approximating 55,000 acres in size, Rocky Boy’s Reservation became the newest—and smallest—reservation in Montana, which was not conducive for agricultural development. In 1917, the Indian Office set the official tribal enrollment for the reservation at 425 persons. The reservation never became allotted, however, as stated previous, due to the difficulty of farming small plots of land in north-central Montana, especially upon the rough ground on Rocky Boy’s Reservation. Thus, even if the entirety of the reservation was prime growing land there would still only have been about 130 acres per person on the reservation. As this paper has illustrated, most of the land on the reservation is not prime growing land, which only exacerbated the futility of setting Rocky Boy’s people as farmers upon the land and, by 1924, Rocky Boy came to be “perhaps the poorest of any reservation in the United States.”

Compared to the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, which provided would-be settlers with 320 acres of choice land, less than 130 acres of tillable land per person at Rocky Boy’s proved utterly insufficient to even make ends meet.

Although granted federal recognition and possessing land protected them from white encroachment, conditions did not improve much after the reservation’s establishment. Influential Chippewa and Cree leaders had mentioned in almost every letter to Linderman before the

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76 Correspondence from Linderman to Rocky Boy, 13 March 1916, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 24, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
77 Correspondence from Franklin K. Lane to John H. Stephens, 16 December 1916, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 16, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
reservation’s establishment that their people were starving. Complaints of lack of food on the reservation continued for the next decade, although white officials reported that the reservation was getting along nicely.

In 1925, sixty-one women of the Rocky Boy’s Reservation composed a letter expressing their displeasure with the Reservation’s superintendent, J.D. Keeley. This letter, written nine years after the establishment of their reservation in 1916, called for the removal of Keeley as superintendent on the grounds that “the U.S. Government… did not send you here to just sit in the office and make money and not take care of these Indians.” In the Rocky Boy women’s estimation, Keeley was guilty of gross negligence; as superintendent of the reservation, it was Keeley’s responsibility to care for, protect, and encourage prosperity on the reservation. Instead, Keeley ran the tribe deeper into debt by purchasing unnecessary items while the tribe remained destitute. The women’s letter indicated that nine years following the establishment of Rocky Boy’s Reservation in 1916, the conditions for the peoples living there had scarcely improved. For the people at Rocky Boy’s Reservation, economic hardship had become the norm; the establishment of a reservation did not enable them to become agriculturally productive people. The women’s discontent with Superintendent Keeley highlights an economic, political, and cultural struggle for the people of Rocky Boy’s Reservation that extended back four decades.

By 1925, as the petition from the sixty-one women of the reservation suggests, the people were every bit as destitute as they were when they were landless. In their scathing condemnation of then-Superintendent, J.D. Keeley, the women urged Keeley to “go in these houses and see how poor we are. You will see lots of them with out flooring… see if you will find anything for

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79 Correspondence from the women of Rocky Boy’s Indian Reservation to Superintendent J.D. Keeley, 11 February 1925, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 13, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mike and Maureen Mansfield Library Archives, Missoula, Montana.
our children to wear. Still you want us to buy… from the government. My husband is in debt enough with out me getting him deeper in debt.” 80 The women’s pleas for Keeley to come into their houses and see the desolation is more than a simple evidentiary showing of the peoples’ desolation; rather, it is a direct charge at Keeley’s—and, by extension, the U.S. government’s—detachment with the realities of life on the reservation. To the women of Rocky Boy’s, Keeley and the U.S. government were not being the paternalistic protectors that they had so long assumed themselves as being; to the women of Rocky Boy’s, the U.S. government was, at best, an absent father, whose attempts to enmesh the Chippewa, Cree, and Métis into capitalist society had failed the tribe, while affecting the United States relatively little.

Conclusion

In 1887, Fort Assinniboine was integrated into the global economy with the arrival of the Great Northern Railroad. This incorporation of the Northern Plains into the American imperial project allowed both people and goods to flow through the region much more efficiently. The railroad also made the enforcement of state power and federal oversight much more efficient, allowing for the expedient transport of troops. While the region’s integration into the American mainstream allowed for a more legible and orderly society, it simultaneously, through its organizational criteria of belonging, worked to exploit certain groups. This expansion of federal power into the Northern Plains, therefore, resulted in not only the removal of the landless Chippewa, Cree, and Métis onto submarginal lands, but instilled a tenuous relationship between local citizenry and the federal government regarding the role of the state as a surveilling and policing entity. The expansion of federal authority and state-sponsored capitalism into the Northern Plains can, therefore, be regarded as an early experiment of the modern police state.

80 Correspondence from the women of Rocky Boy’s Indian Reservation to Superintendent J.D. Keeley, 11 February 1925, MSS 007, Box 42, Folder 13, Frank Bird Linderman Papers, Mansfield Library Archives.
Fort Assinniboine, despite its decline and eventual decommission in the early twentieth century, was not simply abandoned; instead, its imperial legacy shifted from one of active surveillance and policing into historical memory. Formally decommissioned in 1911, the Fort’s area was repurposed in 1916: the buildings remained on the property, a majority of land was opened up for white settlement, perhaps the most fertile portion—a 10,000-acre strip along the Beaver Creek—was set aside as a county park, and a relatively small portion was designated as Rocky Boy’s Indian Reservation. In this sense, the history of Fort Assinniboine came full circle: in 1916 it became home to the same groups of Indians that the U.S. military harried across the Northern Plains. From the late 1880s to 1916, the Chippewa, Cree, and Métis wandered about Montana as the state’s “landless Indians,” largely due to the belief that these groups were “foreign” and belonged under Canadian jurisdiction. The history of Fort Assinniboine, therefore, provides an intriguing perspective through which to view the settlement—and displacement—of the Northern Plains as it became integrated into the American mainstream.
Conclusion

The history of northern Montana’s rapid transformation from tribally owned Native lands to organized homesteads and white settlement would be incomplete without the perspective of the national Reconstruction processes that spurred that transformation. The circuitous establishment of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation is part of the larger legacy of national Reconstruction that sought to dispossess Natives of tribal land ownership and integrate newly ceded lands into the national market economy. The Northern Plains, therefore, serve as a useful lens through which to view American imperial processes in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

In the late-1870s, northern Montana remained isolated from the rest of the United States and served as a refuge for both the dwindling bison populations and various Native groups in the Northern Plains from white encroachment. The area’s disorganized state was largely due to the region’s immense size, the lack of a permanent military installation in the great northern reservation, and the lack of an organized border patrol on either side of the International Boundary. Natives remained relatively free to continue their traditional lifestyles of hunting the bison, freely traversing across the white-imposed boundary, and enjoy self-autonomy. Young Joseph’s desperate retreat to the refuge of the Canadian side of the Medicine Line illustrates the lack of control that the both United States and Canada possessed in these transnational borderlands.

Following the end of the Nez Perce War, the United States recognized the paramount need to construct a large military installation between the Missouri River and the International Boundary. Several regiments of cavalry could effectively manage a large portion of the great northern reservation, halting any Natives from desiring the protection of the “Great Mother,”
defending the areas inhabitants—Natives and the few whites in the region—from potential incursions from the elusive Sitting Bull north of the border, defend against a potential pan-Indian uprising, and hasten the area’s integration into the American mainstream. Fort Assinniboine accomplished all of these things by providing an active policing force, patrolling the boundary, and surveilling the movements of the area’s Natives, while also providing surveys and reports on the ecological makeup and prospects of northern Montana.

The military occupation of the Northern Plains made the region more legible to the United States, allowing for the ensuing influx of capital and white settlement to occur. The Great Northern Railway’s connection to Fort Assinniboine in 1887 linked the fort to the territorial capital in Helena and St. Paul, Minnesota by rail. A few years later, the Pacific extension was completed and Havre, Montana and Fort Assinniboine found themselves halfway along the line connecting East and West. Distances that before would have taken months to travel now became weeks or even days; more goods and people could now go farther, faster. Fort Assinniboine and the U.S. military hastened the region’s economic failure for Native peoples to continue their traditional ways of life which, in turn, led to their land cessions and settlement on smaller, tribal reservations, and opened up the region for the Great Northern.

Many historians have cited the importance of the railroad in the settlement of the trans-Mississippi West, and it is typically regarded as the chief tool of American western expansion. However, in the case of northern Montana, military occupation provided the necessary conditions for which the railroad to pass through. While there were white settlements few and far between in the great northern reservation before 1887, typically those of ranchers who wintered their cattle on the Northern Plains, white settlement into the northern Montana skyrocketed after

1 White, Railroaded, passim.; White, “It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,” 145, 216, 219; Malone, James J. Hill, passim; Hidy, et al., The Great Northern Railroad, passim.
it got its railroad. Numerous boomtowns popped up along the line, including Havre, Montana, which is today the largest city in north of the Missouri River and east of Kalispell.

While the railroad created established townsites along its line, white settlement in northern Montana spiked again with the passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909. In fact, Montana was the only state from 1910 to 1920 whose rural percentage of its total population increased. As the country was rapidly flocking toward the cities, Montana became more rural thanks, in large part, to the vast swaths of land still available in northern Montana that had theretofore been fallible. However, the Progressive Era’s defining characteristic of efficiency in the 1890s and early-twentieth century lead to advances in crop science, irrigation practices, and farming implements, all of which made agriculture in northern Montana risky, but possible.\(^2\) The wave of agricultural settlement into northern Montana in the 1910s and 1920s, carved out with the generous 320-acre plots available through the Enlarged Homestead Act, was made possible through the military occupation a generation earlier.

While the military occupation of northern Montana led to the region’s white settlement and capital development, it simultaneously created the conditions of landlessness and poverty for many Native groups, some of whom had federally recognized reservations. Some, however, had nowhere to go. Following the Riel Rebellion in 1885, various Chippewa, Cree, and Métis participants fled Canadian retribution into northern Montana, as they had moved transnationally for generations. However, the military’s occupation of the northern Montana borderlands and its reinforced patrol of the International Boundary, and questions concerning the nationality—and,  

by extension, responsibility—of the fleeing bands given their transnational history made the
Chippewa, Cree, and Métis a decades-long question in Montana. The Cree removals of the
1890s sought to return the Indians to their native Canada; however, familial and kinship ties, as
well as difficulties in determining the nationalities of transnational Native groups made these
practically impossible. Thus, the Natives remained, largely in a landless state of affairs, in
Montana for another two decades, with legislature concerning their nationhood oftentimes
bogging down any developments in finding them a home. These groups drew considerable ire
from many Montanans during the early-twentieth century, as they found themselves living on the
outskirts of large white cities and sustaining themselves through offal of local abattoirs,
rummaging through city dumps, and killing their horses.

The soldiers at Fort Assinniboine, operating as the military arm of the federal
government, reshaped the region as an ongoing national reconstruction process in the Northern
Plains. This reconstruction sought to control the movements of Native groups throughout the
region, acquire knowledge of both the region’s inhabitants and terrain, and instill into the region
mechanisms of power that would organize the land and peoples around Republican values. In
this sense, the military applied an inescapable force—“a pressure not to be resisted or evaded”—
into the Northern Plains, which allowed for the region’s swift incorporation into the American
empire.

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