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HIST 4903

Dr. Logan

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### **The Black Hills in Color**

“Here’s to the hills of yesterday,  
Here’s to the men they knew,  
Hunters, Miners, and Cattlemen  
And Braves of the wily Sioux.  
Men who rode the lonely trails  
And camped by the gold-washed streams,  
Forced the land to accept their brand  
And suffered the birth of a brave new land...  
Here’s to their valiant dreams.”<sup>1</sup>

The Black Hills began as a serene, sacred place to the Native Americans.<sup>2</sup> The only color for miles was the dark green trees that gave the Black Hills their name.<sup>3</sup> In time, the gold rush would move into the area, introducing many new colors to the region. The colors included red, yellow, black, and white. There were many culturally diverse cities within the Black Hills, and many famous, colorful characters came out of these hills, such as Wild Bill Hickock and Calamity Jane.

The Dakota Gold Rush was a tumultuous time in American history, but it was only one of many 19<sup>th</sup> century, gold rushes that created many tales about the Wild West. The United States (US) government had some interest initially in these rushes because they occurred in territories

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Groves McKelvie, *The Hills of Yesterday*, (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company, Inc., 1960), cover page.

<sup>2</sup> McKelvie, *The Hills of Yesterday*, 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer, Volume 2: From Appomattox to the Little Bighorn*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 511.

regulated by the federal government, territories such as California, Alaska, Colorado, and Dakota Territory.

The Black Hills were a part of the Dakota and Wyoming Territories. In the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868, the US Government formally stated that the Black Hills belong to the Sioux (Lakota-Sioux). The Native Americans began to trade gold with white settlers, which peaked their interest. Mainly white men began moving sporadically into the gulches. The Indians did not like this and they either killed the miners or the US Army removed them if they could be found. "Not until Americans began settling on the Plains or crossing the region in large numbers in the mid-1800s did conflict between U.S. forces and Indians begin there in earnest."<sup>4</sup>

The Black Hills were a mysterious region to the white men. Many men had traveled overland by wagon or helped establish the transcontinental railroad. The Black Hills lay sixty to seventy miles north of Fort Laramie, a common way station on the overland trail. Some Native Americans had been questioned about the treasures within the Hills, but they were very secretive. A minute number of trappers had been into the Hills and reported of their richness. However, "little dependence could be placed on their stories. Trappers are, like sailors, given to spinning long yarns, and it was seriously doubted whether any of them had ever been near the hills, as it was known that the Indians guarded the place with great jealousy."<sup>5</sup>

### **Pre-Custer:**

The Black Hills have a history of people moving in and out. Herbert Schell tells the story of an early reported Indian attack in the Black Hills written on the Thoen Stone:

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen G. Hyslop, *The Old West*, (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic)

<sup>5</sup> Whitaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 501.

“It is generally assumed that while men were in the Black Hills at an early date. In 1887 a stone was discovered near Spearfish with a message bearing the date 1834 cut into it with a knife. The writer stated that he was the only one left of seven men who had gone into the Hills for gold. The Indians had killed the rest and were about to get him.”<sup>6</sup>

The Native Americans did not want to share their land at this point in history. They felt that the white settlers were encroaching on their territory.

Some white travelers respected the Indians and their wishes. In 1857, Lieutenant Warren and his men present such an example of mutual understanding and respect. The party began at Fort Laramie and discovered that travel would not be easy. Warren’s party crossed paths with the Sioux Indians while exploring. The chiefs suggested the party go back unless they start a war. At this point in history, the Sioux and US Government had ‘peace.’ The Warren party did not enter the Sioux’s sacred land and opted to turn around.<sup>7</sup> The Warren Party was not harmed because they respected the Native Americans. This was not always the case, but there are several examples of white settlers passing through Native American territory unharmed. Soon, however, the US government decided to declare war on the hostile Native Americans, to protect miners and settlers. Dodge’s expedition into the Black Hills upset the Northern Sioux. Several miners decided to settle the area after this party went through. “The short summer was the only salvation of the settlers, and when 1876 came, it was clear that the fight could no longer be averted. Under these circumstances, the government resolved for the first time to make war on the hostiles.”<sup>8</sup> This war on the Native Americans utilized the US government’s time and resources. Many settlers and soldiers became casualties. “The 1876 military campaign began after government

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert Samuel Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, (New York: American Book Company, 1942), 84.

<sup>7</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 501-502.

<sup>8</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 528.

officials decided in November 1875 that the Sioux must relinquish the Black Hills region. A proclamation was issued demanding the Indians come to the government's agencies by January 31, 1876, or be declared hostile and forcibly removed."<sup>9</sup>

The US government had negotiated the Treaty of Laramie with the Lakota Sioux in 1868. The Lakota Sioux are comprised of several smaller bands, and some agreed to the treaty at Fort Laramie. They would no longer harass settlers 'passing through their respective territories', the territorial lines were not definitive. The US Government agreed to "protect the tribes against any depredations by Americans."<sup>10</sup>

This treaty promised the land to the Lakota Sioux for "absolute and undisturbed use and occupation."<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that the US government treated the Native American tribes as sovereign states. Often these treaties stripped Native Americans' rights to the land.<sup>12</sup> The Sioux Indians had several bands and not all of them agreed with the Treaty of Laramie. Some of the Sioux Indians would not comply with the ordinances outlined in the Treaty of Laramie and were known as 'the hostiles.' Sitting Bull was the most powerful chief of these bands.<sup>13</sup>

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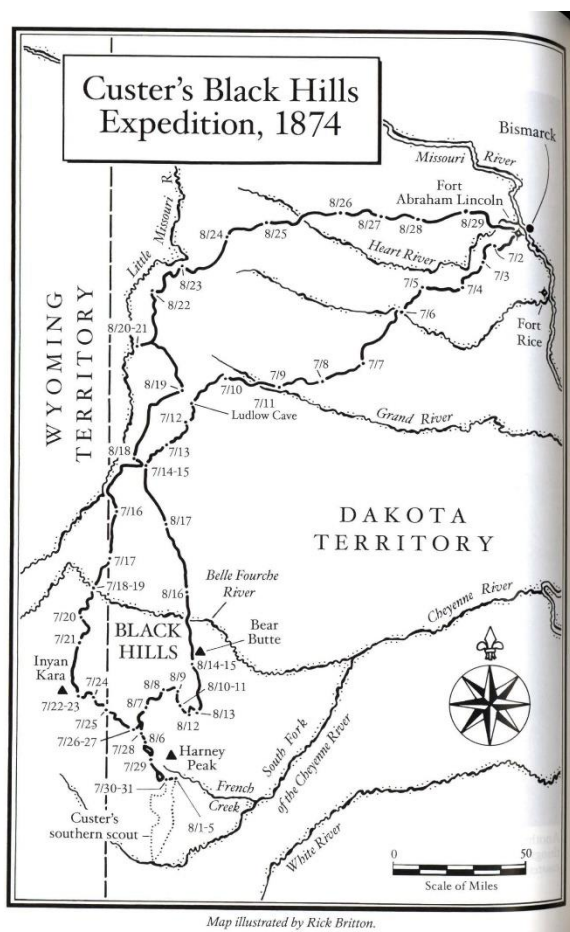
<sup>9</sup> James D. McLaird, *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Hyslop, *The Old West*, 117.

<sup>11</sup> Hyslop, *The Old West*, 212.

<sup>12</sup> *Exhibit: Black Hills Treaty*, National Archives and Records Administration. (Accessed 9/11/17)  
[https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american\\_originals/sioux.html](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/sioux.html)

<sup>13</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 529.



Map illustrated by Rick Britton.

Figure 1: Terry Mort, *Thieves' Road*, pg. 168

As an indication of increasing interest in the Black Hills, the *New York Times* published an article in 1874: “Public attention is attracted to the regions known as the country of the Black Hills, now being explored by a United States expedition commanded by General Custer. Heretofore the greater part of that country has been an unknown land; it is off from the great emigrant routes across the continent, in a region difficult of access, and embraced in the limits of a reservation set apart for the Sioux, a warlike and jealous tribe of Indians.”<sup>14</sup>

### Custer's Influence:

There is evidence that there were white men in the Black Hills before Custer's expedition, but not many. Custer introduced the first cluster of white men into the Hills. The entire country waited to see what he would find deep within the hills. The party was traveling through extremely dangerous territory of a very warlike Indian tribe, the Lakota-Sioux.<sup>15</sup>

Custer's exploration of the Black Hills began July 2, 1874 at Fort Abraham Lincoln.<sup>16</sup> “Lt. Col.

<sup>14</sup> *New York Times*, August 24, 1874.

<sup>15</sup> McKelvie, *The Hills of Yesterday*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Lee, Bob, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society, 2004), 9.

George A. Custer and his Seventh Cavalry spent almost 60 days reconnoitering the Black Hills and the Indian country around it.”<sup>17</sup> They completed their journey on August 30, 1874 having covered 1,205 miles.<sup>18</sup> The party wound up at Fort Pierre.<sup>19</sup> “It was like daring the lion in his own den, and the nation seemed to hold its breath from the time the expedition passed out of sight and disappeared within the bounds of the mystic circle, until it emerged from the other side six weeks later.”<sup>20</sup> The white man remained outside of the Black Hills until 1874 when the US Government commissioned George A. Custer to survey the land. He began at Fort Abraham Lincoln taking several hundred men and plenty of supplies with him. The expedition was “one of the largest and best-equipped expeditions ever launched on the frontier in a time of peace.”<sup>21</sup> The Lakota-Sioux never touched the expedition led by General Custer in 1874. Martha Groves McKelvie states the following as a theory for why the Indians did not attack Custer, “...these Hills were known as sacred ground, or the home of the Great Spirit... whether the astute Chief, Sitting Bull, was unprepared to make a defense at this time, or whether his nonresistance was on account of the reverence vouchsafed to these sacred grounds, is not known; but the expedition encountered no hostile Indians, and, after an exciting and successful trip, General

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<sup>17</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> McKelvie, *The Hills of Yesterday*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> McKelvie, *The Hills of Yesterday*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 85-86.

Custer reported gold in the Southern part of the Hills, to which he gave the name of Custer's Park."<sup>22</sup>

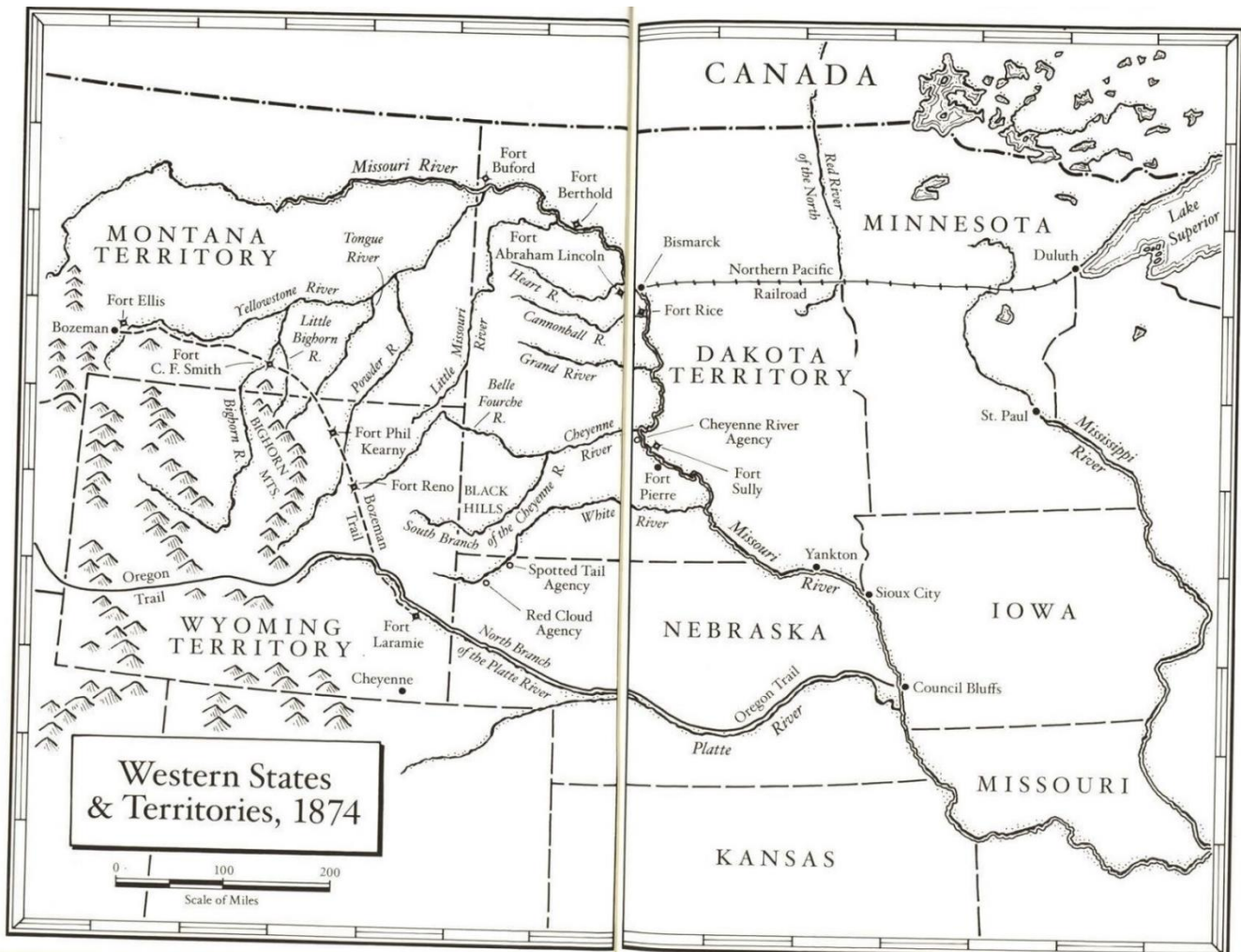


Figure 2 Terry Mort, *Thieves' Road*, Inside Cover

Miners began moving into the Black Hills illegally. The Governor of Dakota Territory knew this. Congress reminded him that the Black Hills belonged to the Sioux people until otherwise noted. The federal government was trying to find a way to blot out the Sioux's rights

<sup>22</sup> McKelvie, *The Hills of Yesterday*, 18-19.



to the land. It was the US Army’s job to remove miners until the government could find a way to get the rights to the land.<sup>23</sup>

The US government realized that miners were not going to stay out of Indian Territory. Greedy to find the ‘color’ in the ground the miners kept encroaching into the area. The miners would not leave the area alone and more were moving in every week. The US government appointed Walter P. Jenney to determine if the resources in the Black Hills were valuable. Jenney discovered gold in ‘paying quantities.’ “When the government tried to buy the mining rights from the Indians, the latter would not agree to the terms proposed. After this, the

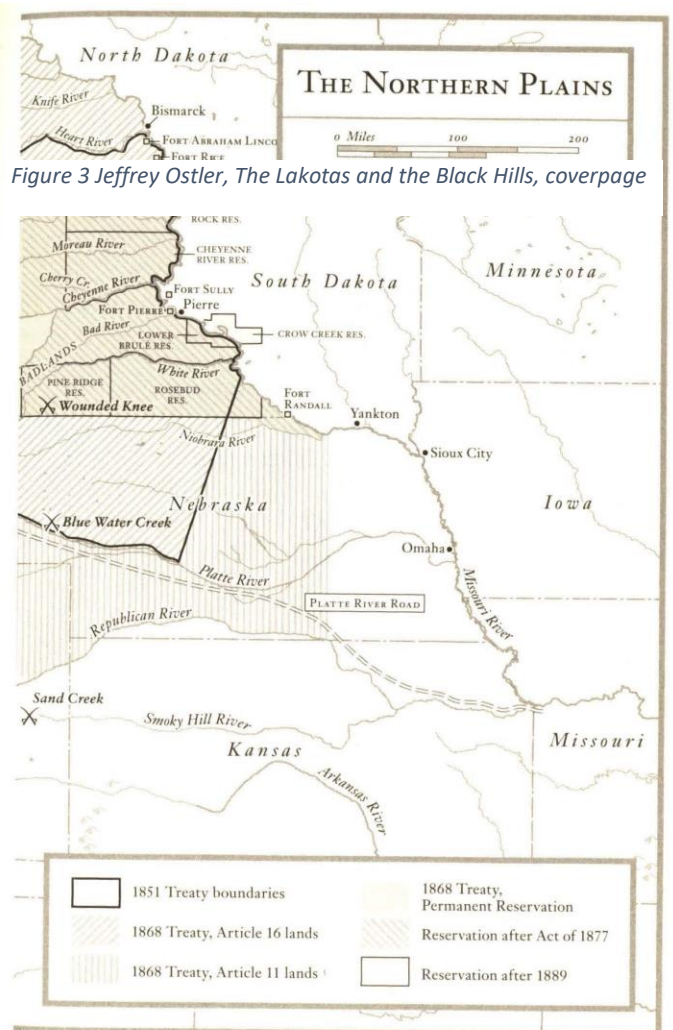
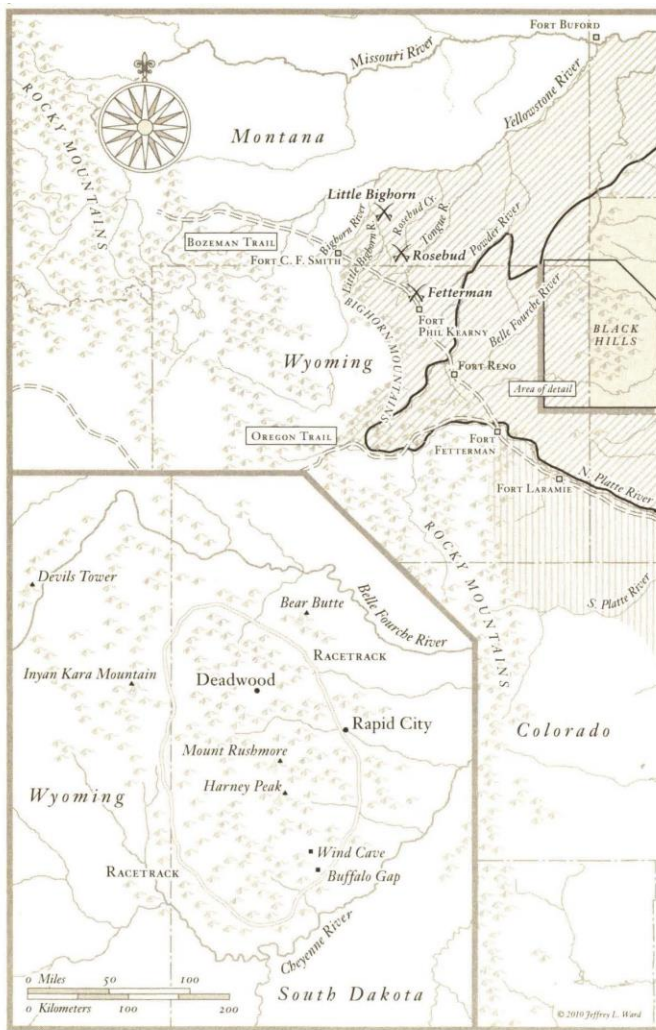


Figure 3 Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills*, coverage page

<sup>23</sup> Terry Mort, *Thieves’ Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer’s Path to Little Bighorn*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2015), 282.



government stopped arresting the miners. By the spring of 1876 probably fifteen thousand, whites were in the Black Hills.”<sup>24</sup> This caused the US government to attempt to renegotiate the 1868 Treaty with the Lakota-Sioux.<sup>25</sup> “The Indians resented this very much and soon went on a warpath. They strongly felt that the whites were not fair to them and were violating the treaty they made in 1868.”<sup>26</sup>

The Battle of Little Bighorn would be the culmination of the Indian Wars for Custer and he begged to travel with the Seventh Cavalry to meet the Indians. He had to beg for permission because of political problems higher than his rank. It was an unfortunate situation because Mr. Helster Clymer forced Custer to participate in the Belknap Case against his will.

The Belknap case was nothing more than speculation. Custer had been preparing an expedition against hostile Indians when suddenly he was called to Washington. Custer had asked for permission to telegram his replies to Clymer’s questions, but Clymer would not allow it. Custer was forced to testify by Clymer, against William Belknap who was a former general and later Secretary of War under US President Ulysses S. Grant. Custer was losing precious time in the fight against the Native Americans. However, Clymer wanted to bring down Grant and his so-called “administration” of wealthy or influential friends.

After the testimony of this case, President Grant had a deep vengeance for anyone involved. This included Custer, “he never paused to inquire whether the latter was a willing witness, whether his testimony was dragged out of him or not; he made up his mind that Custer had turned against him in his period of trial, and he became bitterly and inexorably incensed

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<sup>24</sup> Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 86.

<sup>25</sup> Betti Vanepps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives: African Americans in South Dakota*, (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>26</sup> Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 87.

against him, personally.”<sup>27</sup> Custer would then pay a visit to the White House and be forced to wait in the ante-room for hours.<sup>28</sup> He went on three different occasions and Grant refused to see him, on May 1 Custer resorted to leaving the President a note and begin his journey back to Fort Lincoln.<sup>29</sup> Custer’s note read as follows:

To-day for the third time I have sought an interview with the President – not to solicit a favor, except to be granted a brief hearing – but to remove from his mind certain unjust impressions concerning myself, which I have reason to believe are entertained against me. I desire this opportunity simply as a matter of justice, and I regret that the President has declined to give me an opportunity to submit to him a brief statement, which justice to him, as well as to me, demanded.<sup>30</sup>

The President read the note and still refused to see Custer.<sup>31</sup>

Custer forced to stay in Washington for over a month had lost valuable time for preparation. General Sheridan forcibly stopped Custer in Chicago on May 4 at the request of General Sherman directed by Grant because he wanted to humiliate Custer by not allowing him to be a part of the expedition. Grant “knew that if Custer went in command of the Dakota column he was certain to return victorious, with fresh laurels.”<sup>32</sup> Grant could not allow that to happen. Grant eventually allowed Custer to return to Fort Lincoln to be with his family, but he could not accompany the expedition. Custer pleaded with Grant for permission to go as a soldier and not be in command. Custer stated, “I appeal to you as a soldier to spare me the humiliation of seeing

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<sup>27</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 551-552.

<sup>28</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 552.

<sup>29</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 553.

<sup>30</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 553.

<sup>31</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 553.

<sup>32</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 555.

my regiment march to meet the enemy and I not share its dangers.”<sup>33</sup> Then, Brigadier General A.H. Terry asked President Grant to have Custer accompany him. Custer listened and followed command for the most part. The Battle of Little Bighorn was an unfortunate fight. Soon Custer would be forced into the position to make a decision and make a decision he did. He chose to do things his way. “Custer had chosen the best ground to be found, and was determined to retreat no further. By this time, Custer, having realized that Reno suffered a defeat, he put his faith in Benteen to come help him and his men. The Indians were all around him, but a vigorous attack by Benteen on their rear would beat them, could Custer only hold them long enough.”<sup>34</sup>

The aftermath of the battlefield of The Little Bighorn was truly brutal. Utter annihilation, along with the bright red color of blood was everywhere. Godfrey recalled: “...occasionally there was a body with a bloody undershirt or trousers or socks, but the name was invariably cut out. The naked, mutilated bodies, with their bloody, fatal wounds, were nearly unrecognizable, and presented a scene of sickening ghastly horror!”<sup>35</sup> The Indians had an extreme hatred for Custer and referred to him as ‘Yellow Hair.’<sup>36</sup> Fighting bravely to their death Custer and 262 men died in the battle.<sup>37</sup> As a historian M. Terry summarized, “the shock of the battle intensified white hatred of the Plains tribes and intensified the call for vengeance.”<sup>38</sup>

A handful of Native Americans were interviewed later about the Battle of Little Bighorn. The interview with Brave Wolf goes as follows:

I was in the Cheyenne Camp, and when Reno made his charge, I went with the rest to meet him. We fought there. I saw the soldiers all go down [into] the timber. I

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<sup>33</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 559.

<sup>34</sup> Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, 597.

<sup>35</sup> James Willert, *Little Bighorn Diary: Chronicle of the 1876 Indian War*, (Duarte: James Willert, 1982), 426.

<sup>36</sup> *Yellow Hair*, <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/program/episodes/six/yellowhair.htm>

<sup>37</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 291.

<sup>38</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 291.

could never understand why they left it, for if they had stayed there, they would have been all right; but they ran out of the timber across the river and up the hill. The citizen packers and the pack mules were on the hill before Reno got there. Then we heard the shooting below, and all rushed down the river.

When I got to the Cheyenne camp, the fighting had been going on for some time. The soldiers (Custer's) were right down close to the stream, but none were on this side. Just as I got there, the soldiers began to retreat up the narrow gulch. They were all drawn up in line of battle, shooting well and fighting hard, but there were so many people around them that they could not help being killed. They still held their line of battle and kept fighting and falling from their horses – fighting and falling all the way up, nearly to where the monument now stands. I think all their horses had been killed before they got quite to the top of the hill. None got there on horseback, and only a few on foot.

A part of those who had reached the top of the hill went on over and tried to go to the stream. But they killed them all going down the hill before any of them got to the creek. It was hard fighting, very hard all the time. I have been in many hard fights, but I never saw such brave men.<sup>39</sup>

There has been much debate surrounding why the Native Americans killed Custer with so much violence and hatred. History scholar, Terry Mort believes that Custer was not killed because the Native Americans were angry over the Black Hills; rather it was because Custer bit off more than he could chew. Custer being a confident man failed to do the necessary surveying and attacked a village three times greater than he previously thought. Mort states that Custer “died because his two subordinate commanders failed him, although given the numbers engaged against the cavalry, it's doubtful that even the combined force of the Seventh Cavalry could have escaped defeat, if not annihilation. And Custer died because of overconfidence in himself and the troops...”<sup>40</sup> “Thieves' Road” is the name of the path paved into the Black Hills. The path earned this name because the white men went in and took the red man's land because they wanted the precious gold out of the ground.

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<sup>39</sup> Richard G. Hardoff, *Cheyenne Memories of the Custer Fight*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 35-36.

<sup>40</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 301.

Soon, the US military had to take a temporary break from fighting the Indian Wars. They had just suffered two major losses: the Rosebud on June 17 and Custer's battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25-26.<sup>41</sup> The Battle of Rosebud took place on June 17, 1876.

Rosebud Battlefield is associated with the lead up to the Battle of Little Bighorn. It represents the proactive position of the 1,500 Sioux and Northern Cheyenne as they forced the withdrawal of Brigadier General George Crook's 1,000 troops at Rosebud Creek. The presence of thousands of warriors and soldiers on the field on June 17, 1876, made the day one of the largest battles of the Indian wars. Eight days later, because Crook's troops were withdrawn from the war zone to resupply, they were not available to support Colonel Custer and his troops at Little Bighorn. The Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors overtook Colonel George Custer and his 263 soldiers at Little Bighorn. This defeat shocked the nation celebrating its Centennial and ultimately led to a counter attack and to the Lakota's loss of the Black Hills. The battle at Rosebud Creek was exceptionally significant because the Indians fought as an army with great intensity to defend their traditional land.<sup>42</sup>

The US Army would systematically rethink their strategy and try again finding eventual success.

### **Gold Rush:**

After Custer's death, people continued to flow into the Black Hills. The US and Sioux reached an agreement in October 1876, which stated the Black Hills now belonged to the United States.<sup>43</sup> The Indians reluctantly agreed to the new treaty drawn up six weeks after Custer's death.

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<sup>41</sup> Willert, *Little Bighorn Diary: Chronicle of the 1876 Indian War*, 427.

<sup>42</sup> Rosebud Battlefield State Park, <http://stateparks.mt.gov/rosebud-battlefield/>

<sup>43</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 292.

The chiefs had to decide whether to “sell the Hills or starve.”<sup>44</sup> A mere ten percent of the Lakotas agreed to the treaty, but that was enough for the US government.<sup>45</sup> Soon settlers established mining camps all over the hills. To gain entry into the Black Hills the settlers used four main routes: the Cheyenne, Sydney, Fort Pierre, and Bismarck Trails. Named for where the parties began their journeys, the trails all led to the Black Hills.<sup>46</sup> “The whites who followed Custer's path into the Black Hills called it the "Freedom Trail." The Lakota called it "Thieves' Road.”<sup>47</sup>

“Gold there is, everywhere granitic areas; gold enough to make many fortunes, and tempt to the loss of many more. The very uncertainty has a fascination for many men. It is a grand lottery! Only a few draw prizes, but each may be the favorite of the fickle goddess.”<sup>48</sup> One of the first hot spots for gold rushing was the Dakota Territory, and the rush occurred in distinct phases: the First, Second, and Third Dakota Boom.

The first men began to arrive in sizable numbers to the Dakota Country in the late 1850s. A vast majority arrived in 1868 after the Sioux were removed from the Black Hills and relocated to a reservation west of the Missouri River.<sup>49</sup> The first “Dakota Boom” took place from 1868-1873. The soil was great for growing crops and the weather had been relatively mild. The key aspect for success were the railroad connections to the Midwest where farmers could market their goods.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 302.

<sup>45</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 292.

<sup>46</sup> Leander Pease Richardson, *A Trip to the Black Hills and Deadwood, 1876*, e-book 11

<sup>47</sup> *Yellow Hair*, <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/program/episodes/six/yellowhair.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Richard Irving Dodge, *The Black Hills: A Minute Description of the Routes, Scenery, Soil, climate, Timber, Gold, Geology, Zoology, Etc.*, (New York: James Miller Publisher, 1876), 151.

<sup>49</sup> Greg Bradsher, *How the West Was Settled: The 150-Year-Old Homestead Act Lured Americans Looking for a New Life and New Opportunities*, (Accessed October 27, 2017).

<https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/prologue/2012/winter/homestead.pdf> , 29.

<sup>50</sup> Bradsher, *How the West Was Settled*, 29.

From 1873-1879 a second “Dakota Boom” took place. This was possible because of the further extension of railroads to the West and the markets continued growth. The 1875 Black Hills gold rush was the main attraction for miners to move into Dakota Territory.<sup>51</sup>

Then from 1878-1885 a third “Dakota Boom” took place. “The railroad lines, especially the Great Northern Railroad, pushed further west, and prosperity returned to the country after the Panic of 1873.”<sup>52</sup> Thousands of people flooded into the area.

The major gold sites often turned into cities. A few popular cities in the Northern and Southern Black Hills soon blossomed. The main concentration of miners lived in the cities or near their mining sites. It is important to note; cultures built the cities. For example, the Chinese settled in Deadwood. The gold rush towns often housed a variety of people, not just white men, causing some towns to appear rough around the edges, and to rise and fall quickly. “They grew like mushrooms, springing up fast one day to be almost completely deserted a little later as new gold discoveries were made elsewhere. Many mining camps were abandoned later. Such towns we call 'ghost towns.'”<sup>53</sup>

In the South, the main cities were Custer City and Rapid City. William T. McKay and Horatio N. Ross discovered gold in French Creek on July 30. “General Custer wrote a dispatch, saying that the soldiers had discovered gold in the roots of the grass and that it could be found in paying quantities almost anywhere. News was flashed all over the country, and the Black Hills gold rush was soon in full swing.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bradsher, *How the West Was Settled*, 29.

<sup>52</sup> Bradsher, *How the West Was Settled*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 88.

<sup>54</sup> Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 86.



A majority of the population settled in the Northern Hills after the initial rush of 1875. Established in 1876, the major towns consisted of Deadwood, Lead, and Spearfish.<sup>55</sup> Deadwood was the largest city in the Northern Black Hills and officially became a town on April 26, 1876.

Lead officially became a town in the spring of 1876.<sup>56</sup> Lead became a home to many people from different cultures. It soon had a reputation of being the “miniature melting pot” of the Black Hills.<sup>57</sup> “Where the Chinese predominated in Deadwood, in Lead it was the Slavonian people who came, saw, and conquered a raw, tough, uncompromising mining town.”<sup>58</sup> The cultures separated themselves by neighborhood in Lead, rather than mixing like other Northern Hills mining towns.<sup>59</sup>

### **Population Demographics of the Black Hills:**

Cities in the Northern Hills commonly known as “melting pots” were home to many differing cultures.<sup>60</sup> Deadwood, Lead, and Spearfish were the largest cities in the Northern Hills. “The most prominent nationalities in the region included English (mostly Cornish), Chinese, Italians, Slavonians, Scotch, Irish, French, Norwegians, Finnish, Swedes, Danes, Jews, and Germans. There was also a sizable number of Negroes in the area in the early years.”<sup>61</sup> This so-called ‘melting pot’ would be the home of many colorful people and cultures. Cultures often separated themselves by town or at the very least by neighborhood.

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<sup>55</sup>Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 88.

<sup>56</sup> Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota: Fourth Edition, Revised*, (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society, 2004), 141.

<sup>57</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 36.

The population demographics of the Black Hills is very interesting. The cultures were very diverse because the West allowed people to more freely express themselves and their ideas. For example, there were Native Americans, White miners, African American miners, Chinese miners, and various European immigrants. The colorful nature of these people added diversity to the dark Black Hills. These colors included red, yellow, black, and white to name a few.

The Native Americans historically known as the ‘red man,’ made up a large portion of the population in the West. The Lakota Sioux was the largest Native American tribe in this region. This tribe having a reputation for violence attacked the miners that encroached on their territory. Relationships between the Native Americans and miners began to deteriorate leading to many violent attacks. The expeditions that were heading for the Hills had to be extra aware of their surroundings and provide their own defense against the hostile Native Americans. Soon, the military troops would be relieved of policing the area as of December 1875.<sup>62</sup> “During the early months of 1876, when the nonagency Sioux moved northwards along the Black Hills to join Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse in the Powder River Country, many small expeditions were exposed to attack.”<sup>63</sup> This was a result of the removal of the troops and ever-persistent negative Indian and US governmental relations. The agreement of 1877 ceded the Black Hills to the United States, but the attacks did not necessarily stop. Almost immediately, miners began to flood the region to find the elusive gold.

Often referred to as color, gold deposits were mainly found in the grass and streambeds. It was common to hear miners saying things like ‘there is color in the grass’ or ‘there is color in

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<sup>62</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota: Fourth Edition, Revised*, 143.

<sup>63</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota: Fourth Edition, Revised*, 143.

the stream.<sup>64</sup> Even the Indians referred to gold as, “the yellow metal that drives men crazy.”<sup>65</sup> Black Elk also called gold, ‘yellow metal.’<sup>66</sup>

The Chinese people had a large presence in Deadwood. “Some had worked for the Central Pacific in its race with the Union Pacific for the intercontinental link in Utah. They followed closely the opening of the Black Hills, arriving in 1876-1877, and soon establishing themselves as placer miners, cooks, laundrymen, and servants.”<sup>67</sup> The railroad business brought several people to the Black Hills.<sup>68</sup> Some people would stay in the area and this helped establish cities.

There was also a substantial population of African American people in the Black Hills. The Civil War had freed the slaves in 1865 at its conclusion and they used this newfound freedom to explore new opportunities out west. Being more open to change, the culture out west embraced people of color with open arms, more so than the people on the East coast. The African American people typically were treated better than the Chinese people were at this time. “Anecdotal evidence, newspaper accounts, and the recollections of the immediate descendants of the first settlers suggest that these African American settlers were treated reasonably well in the Black Hills, where they had an easier time than the Chinese, who were perceived as ‘heathen’.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Dodge, *The Black Hills: A Minute Description of the Routes, Scenery, Soil, climate, Timber, Gold, Geology, Zoology, Etc.*, 104.

<sup>65</sup> Sean Callery, *The Dark History of America's Old West*, (Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2011), 35.

<sup>66</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 287.

<sup>67</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 36.

<sup>68</sup> Vanepps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives: African Americans in South Dakota*, 71.

<sup>69</sup> Vanepps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives: African Americans in South Dakota*, 73.

## Colorful Characters:

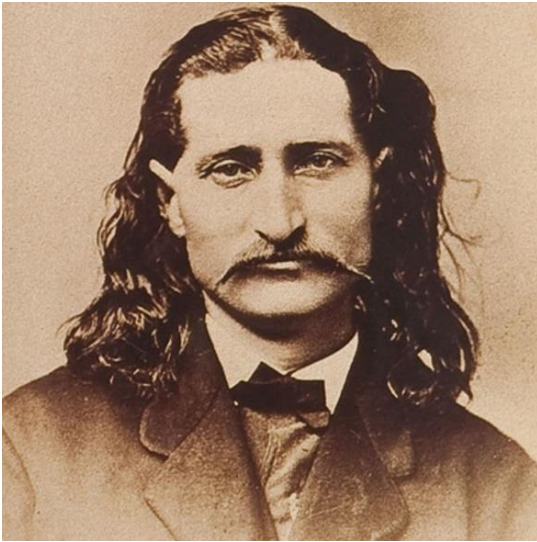


Figure 4 Calamity Jane<sup>70</sup>



Figure 5 Wild Bill Hickock<sup>71</sup>

“By 1880, Deadwood, Sturgis, Spearfish, and Lead had become the trading centers for mining camps in the northern Black Hills. Deadwood, clinging precariously to the sides of the mountains, boasted more saloons and brothels than churches. It was home to humanity of all shapes, sizes, colors, and origins, from Chinese to African Americans. Besides law-abiding citizens and hard-working businessmen, there was a goodly share of petty thieves, outlaws, gamblers, prostitutes, speculators, Indians, and military men – including Buffalo soldiers – on business or on liberty. Nearly all Americans today recognize the town as the meeting place of colorful characters like Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickock, who met his death over a card game in a Deadwood Saloon.”<sup>72</sup> People often traveled west to discover new opportunities. Among the group that settled the mining towns lie the criminals who had established a reputation

<sup>70</sup> <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-5Cza4gnh2hs/U5CyoWSkbZI/AAAAAAAAANC0/SUDSocV8Jlw/s1600/Calamity-Jane+3.png>

<sup>71</sup> <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-ZopEWim5LWc/VZygk-ohIsI/AAAAAABero/EgIplm17eCo/s1600/MTE5NTU2MzE1OTQ5NzI5MjIx.jpg>

<sup>72</sup> Vanepps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives: African Americans in South Dakota*, 73.

of being notorious and undesirable characters.<sup>73</sup> It is important to note that, “Whatever their motives for coming, they came in ever-growing numbers – the good, the bad, and the undefined.”<sup>74</sup>

James Butler Hickock better known as Wild Bill Hickock is a notorious character from the American West. He spent a short time in Deadwood before being fatally shot during a game of cards on August 2, 1876. He was only 39 years old when Jack McCall shot him in the back of the head at the Bell Union Saloon.<sup>75</sup> McCall tried to outrun justice, but ultimately was unsuccessful. The trial found him guilty and shortly after, he was hanged.<sup>76</sup>

Martha Canary, also known as, Calamity Jane was a woman who challenged the social norms. She was tough, brazen, and not afraid to do what the men did such as hunting and riding horses. She “joined General Custer as a scout in 1870 for the Arizona Indian Campaign.”<sup>77</sup> She had typically worn women’s clothing until she joined Custer’s party where she wore the soldier’s uniform. She states, “It was a bit awkward at first but I soon got to be perfectly at home in men’s clothes.”<sup>78</sup> She was a part of the Jenney-Newton Expedition in May 1875 where she attempted to hide among the men.<sup>79</sup> The officers and civilians knew she was there and began to make light of it.<sup>80</sup> Canary describes herself as “the most reckless and daring rider and one of the best shots in the western country.”<sup>81</sup> Captain Egan gave her the name “Calamity Jane.” She tells the story as follows,

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<sup>73</sup> Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 90.

<sup>74</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> Martha Canary, “Calamity Jane”, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, e-book 35, 41

<sup>76</sup> Canary, “Calamity Jane”, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, e-book 48

<sup>77</sup> Canary, “Calamity Jane”, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, e-book 16

<sup>78</sup> Canary, “Calamity Jane”, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, e-book 16

<sup>79</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 11.

<sup>80</sup> Paul L. Herden, *HO! For the Black Hills*, (Pierre, State Historical Society Press, 2012), 40.

<sup>81</sup> Canary, “Calamity Jane”, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, e-book 16

We were ordered out to quell an uprising of the Indians, and were out for several days... When on returning to the Post we were ambushed about a mile and a half from our destination. When fired upon Capt. Egan was shot. I was riding in advance and on hearing the firing in my saddle and saw the Captain reeling in his saddle as though about to fall. I turned my horse and galloped back with all haste to his side and got there in time to catch him as he was falling. I lifted him onto my horse in front of me and succeeded in getting him safely to the Fort. Capt. Egan on recovering, laughingly said: "I name you Calamity Jane, the heroine of the plains."<sup>82</sup>

She also speaks of how she met Wild Bill Hickock. She had been sick in bed for 14 days while carrying messages. Canary met Wild Bill while he was on his way to Fort Laramie. They would both wind up in Dakota Territory in Deadwood. Canary would stay in Deadwood until the fall of 1877 and then traveled for seventeen years before returning to Deadwood.<sup>83</sup>

Wild Bill Hickock and Calamity Jane "were as controversial as they were colorful."<sup>84</sup>

Their reputations followed them around all over the American West. Their stories have become legends.

### **Racism in the Mining Camps:**

Being more open to change the West included many opportunities for people of color, but this did not completely exclude the people of color from racist practices. The Chinese were the main victims of this racism, often referred to as 'heathens.' Most of the Chinese people came to the US on labor contracts and then scattered themselves throughout the mining camps.<sup>85</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup> Canary, "Calamity Jane", *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, e-book 22, 29

<sup>83</sup> Canary, "Calamity Jane", *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, e-book 54, 66

<sup>84</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 32.

<sup>85</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 36.

Chinese men overshadowed many other cultures within Deadwood. They had a reputation for being an effervescent group of people.<sup>86</sup> “The stolid, honest, and hard-working yellowmen, loyal only to their own race, built their own city within Deadwood City, the largest self-ruled Chinatown east of San Francisco.”<sup>87</sup> The white women of Deadwood had a deep dislike of the Chinese portion of town. Chinatown had some practices that the white citizens did not necessarily approve of, among these were, the opium dens and prostitution. The white women were extremely against these practices and “considered them a curse on the community.”<sup>88</sup> The women were worried that these temptations would ruin the lives of their husbands and destroy their families. The women insisted, “Either the Chinese discontinue these illegal and deadly practices or they must go!” Gradually, the Chinese left and the ‘city within a city’ disintegrated with each departure.”<sup>89</sup>

The African Americans did receive some poor treatment in the mining camps, but they were more liked than the Chinese. The African Americans became a part of the gold rush in 1876 because they wanted the ‘color’ as much as the white man. Few actually remained in the Northern Black Hills after the initial rush.<sup>90</sup> The white men did not want the black men in their mining camps and thus sent a party of four on a ‘wild goose chase.’<sup>91</sup> On the other side of the mountain: “The Negroes found rich deposits in the area still known today as ‘Nigger Hill,’<sup>92</sup> just east of Tinton, 17 miles as the crow flies west of Deadwood. Working the area hard, the black

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<sup>86</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 36.

<sup>88</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 39.

<sup>89</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 40.

<sup>91</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 40.

<sup>92</sup> The place formerly known as “Nigger Hill” has been renamed to “African Hill.” This took place in the early 2000s because the name was offensive.



men were soon able to load their bonanza of gold dust aboard their burros and leave the area ‘well heeled’, never to return.”<sup>93</sup>

### **Mining Town Business:**

Situated among the cities in the Black Hills lay many saloons, brothels, and gambling places. Being a lucrative business, the whiskey industry thrived in the Black Hills. “The No. 1, gilt-edged business was whiskey – lots of it!”<sup>94</sup> Hundreds of saloons would operate in the Black Hills.

Dance halls operated in the mining towns to provide entertainment. These businesses were controversial. The white women of Deadwood did not like the Chinese prostitutes. They considered themselves above the prostitutes who they considered as a curse to the town.<sup>95</sup> Many of the businesses operated on the second story of saloons. The dancing women referred to as “soiled doves” performed in the tiny areas above the bars if they wanted to work.<sup>96</sup> The first record of “soiled doves” in the Black Hills was in Custer City in January 1876.<sup>97</sup>

Some groups of people realized that mining the gold dust would be a lot of hard work so they chose to set up businesses. The Germans often set up businesses for the miners to spend their money. The businessmen wanted the miners to spend their hard earned gold dust on their products, such as axes and luxury items, allowing them to make a profit with a more sustainable business than digging or sluicing.<sup>98</sup> The miners were looking for items that would provide luxury

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<sup>93</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 40.

<sup>94</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 41.

<sup>95</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 51.

<sup>97</sup> Mort, *Thieves’ Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer’s Path to Little Bighorn*, 290.

<sup>98</sup> There were a few different ways to obtain gold from the ground or streambed. These methods included panning, digging, and sluicing. To pan for gold a miner would stand in the stream, pull up dirt, and shake it through a pan sifting the gold nuggets out. In digging, a miner could sometimes pull gold from the ground if lucky. Sluicing was

within the mining camps.<sup>99</sup> Living in the mining camps a majority of the men did not have the ability to purchase luxury items. Other examples of successful businesses were hardware stores, freight companies, and farmers who grew food for the miners.<sup>100</sup>

### **Mining Laws:**

The Black Hills gold rush caused an influx of people into the area. The many colorful characters brought crime with them. Soon town governments would be necessary alongside county legislatures. The next agenda would be creating and enforcing mining laws.<sup>101</sup>

The laws in mining towns were very loose. There was often no official rules; it was more of a system of trust. It took time for political, social, and economic structures to develop.<sup>102</sup> There were often men who stepped up as sheriffs in the restless towns. For example, in Deadwood, Seth Bullock and Sol Star made an attempt at a formal government in the city. Star had an impressive resume, which included mayor of Deadwood for 14 years and clerk of courts in Lawrence County for 20 years. Bullock had a reputation for being a warranted lawman and the citizens made him the “de facto” sheriff of Deadwood.<sup>103</sup> This was a very dangerous position, but he was the most qualified to hold it. The community established a small para-military group called “Custer’s Minute Men.” These men were to protect the communities from Indian raids.<sup>104</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

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the most expensive and time-consuming method. A sluice box had to be set up in a stream, and often many men worked one box.

<sup>99</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Mort, *Thieves’ Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer’s Path to Little Bighorn*, 293.

<sup>101</sup> Schell, *South Dakota: Its Beginnings and Growth*, 91.

<sup>102</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 31.

<sup>103</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 34.

<sup>104</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota: Fourth Edition, Revised*, 143.

In conclusion, the Black Hills gold rush though whitewashed throughout history is indeed very colorful. The colors included the people, the gold, and the legends. "It is estimated that before the hill's wealth petered out, over a million dollars in gold dust was recovered."<sup>105</sup> Some sources say the number is as high as 17.5 million dollars in gold dust or nuggets. "But in the entire saga of the Black Hills, its prelude and aftermath, none of the parties, red or white, emerges blameless. In that sense, the Hills are a metaphor for the settlement of the west. There was more than enough cruelty, violence, and guilt to go around."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Lee, *Gold, Gals, Guns, Guts*, 40.

<sup>106</sup> Mort, *Thieves' Road: The Black Hills Betrayal and Custer's Path to Little Bighorn*, 303.

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