



Revised History

George Armstrong Custer And All That

By Al Benson August 8, 2020

Years ago I saw a bumper sticker for a car that said “Custer died for your sins.” I don’t know who put it out, some Indian group or what, but I felt it was a bit on the blasphemous side. Jesus Christ died to pay for my sins and then He arose from the dead on the first Easter morning. Custer had nothing to do with it, thank heaven! He would have been a pitiful savior.

Quite a while back now someone gave me a book by Stephen E. Ambrose called *Crazy Horse and Custer*. The paperback version was published in 2003, so I assume a hardback version came out sometime previous to that.

Mr. Ambrose presented some interesting material on Custer, some of which I had not seen before. Let me say here and now that I am no fan of George Armstrong Custer. He was ruthless, ambitious and, I think, he wanted to be president at some point but events at the Little Big Horn deprived him of that golden opportunity. But I think he was working towards it.

On page 254 Ambrose told us plainly that Custer was, to all intents and purposes, a racist. He didn’t feel that blacks were equal to whites and he was not in favor of “legal equality.” He also had some revelatory commentary about William Tecumseh Sherman. He noted that Sherman “knew that the only way to win a guerilla war was to round up the people and put them in concentration camps, where they could be watched and controlled...When the hunting played out, they would stay within the boundaries of their concentration camps.” Here he was referring to their reservations in a way you seldom see, but he was right. That’s exactly what the reservations were—and are. Possibly an early preview of our FEMA “re-education camps.”

Ambrose noted that the Yankee generals, Grant and Sherman, and probably Sheridan and others planned to deliberately provoke the Sioux into all-out war which they felt would lead to Sioux extermination which would be the “final solution” to the Indian problem. Then all that reservation land (really concentration camp land) could be thrown open for white settlement and the people involved in that process would make lots of money.

Sherman had no regard whatever for Indian lives. He said “The more we can kill this year, the less will have to be killed next year for the more I see of these Indians the more I am convinced that they will all have to be killed or be maintained as a species of paupers.” That prospect didn’t bother Sherman or Custer or any of them. They had thoroughly trashed the South during the War of Northern Aggression so they should be perfectly able to do the same thing to a batch of benighted savages!

From the Indian point of view, they were defending their homes and hunting grounds and the buffalo, which they depended on for sustenance, were being slaughtered and so they retaliated. Over the years I have watched so many militant, leftist blacks complain about how bad they have been treated. In actuality, the people that Washington really screwed over were the American Indians. And Sherman, Sheridan and the rest used Custer to kill Indians.

Like Sherman, Sheridan believed in total war and he made sure the Indians, combatants and non-combatants alike, felt the wrath of the federal government. After all, they were in the way. People with friends in Washington wanted their land because there were big bucks to be made off of it and so the Indians’ concentration camps usually ended up being the worst land possible, land no one could make a living off of and yet the Indians were expected to farm it and make a living off of it.

Before the Battle of the Washita in Oklahoma Custer had little experience with Indian fighting, but Sherman and Sheridan rescued him from some political problems and sent him out to kill Indians and he performed admirably. His style of Indian warfare was what they wanted, and besides, if he ended up doing too well, Sherman and Sheridan could always lay the blame for atrocities on him and thereby escape any blame themselves.

One stain on Custer's reputation at the Battle of the Washita was the loss of Major Elliott and 19 of his men that somehow went missing during the battle. After the fighting was over Custer retreated without ever trying to find out what happened to Major Elliot and his men. It turned out they had been killed, but Custer didn't know that for sure and he left anyway.

To say that Custer was vain and ambitious is to put it mildly. As far as being president, Ambrose noted that "If the Democrats in Washington put that bee in his bonnet while he was testifying against Belknap, it seems possible that the bee would have been just the thing to stir Custer's ambition...Of course Custer would have liked to have been President. Not that he had any program that he was burning to put through for the future benefit of his country—far from it. But the prestige, the glory, the admiration, the sense of being an historic personage—in short, all the things Custer wanted most—would be his forever." I thought years back that Custer wanted to be President. It seems that Ambrose did also.

So Custer didn't die for anyone's sins. He died because of his ambition and ego and because he doubted the willingness of his Indian adversaries to fight to keep what they felt was theirs when people like Custer and his superiors felt they had no rights. Custer was far from universally loved, even by those in his command. It would seem that some of them recognized who and what Custer really was—hardly the plaster saint movies have made him out to be.