

History Of The Cheyenne Tribe



History of the Cheyenne Tribe is a rich tapestry woven from centuries of cultural evolution, resilience, and adaptation. The Cheyenne people, whose name translates to "people of a different speech," are a Native American tribe originally from the Great Plains. Their history is marked by their migration patterns, distinct cultural practices, interactions with European settlers, and the profound impacts of wars and treaties. This article delves into the multifaceted history of the Cheyenne tribe, exploring their origins, lifestyle, conflicts, and contemporary status.

Origins and Early History

The roots of the Cheyenne tribe can be traced back to the Algonquian-speaking peoples of the Great Lakes region. They are believed to have migrated westward in the 17th century, eventually settling in the areas that would become North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming.

Cultural Background

- Language: The Cheyenne language is part of the Algonquian family, which connects them to other tribes in the eastern United States.
- Social Structure: Traditionally, the Cheyenne society was organized into bands, each led by a council of elders and chiefs. The two main divisions were the Northern Cheyenne and the Southern Cheyenne, which later played significant roles in their history.
- Spirituality: The Cheyenne people held a deep spiritual connection to the land, with a belief system centered around the Great Spirit and various natural elements.

Way of Life

The Cheyenne's lifestyle was predominantly nomadic, heavily influenced by the vast bison herds that roamed the Great Plains.

Subsistence and Economy

- **Bison Hunting:** The Cheyenne relied on bison for food, clothing, and tools. Their hunting techniques included communal hunts and the use of horses, which were introduced by Spanish colonizers.
- **Gathering and Agriculture:** In addition to hunting, the Cheyenne gathered wild plants and practiced some agriculture, growing crops like corn, beans, and squash.

Housing and Daily Life

- **Tipis:** The Cheyenne lived in tipis, which were portable and well-suited to their nomadic lifestyle. Made from wooden poles and animal hides, tipis provided warmth and shelter.
- **Community Life:** Daily life involved communal activities, including storytelling, dancing, and rituals that reinforced their cultural identity.

Interactions with European Settlers

With the arrival of European settlers in the 19th century, the Cheyenne's way of life faced significant changes.

Trade and Conflict

- **Trade Relations:** Early interactions with fur traders and settlers led to some trade opportunities, but these relationships soon soured as competition for resources intensified.
- **Military Conflicts:** The expansion of American settlers into Cheyenne territories prompted conflicts. The Cheyenne were often in battles with settlers and U.S. military forces, particularly during the Gold Rush.

The Sand Creek Massacre

One of the darkest chapters in Cheyenne history is the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864.

- **Background:** Tensions had escalated due to the U.S. government's attempts to force Cheyenne and other tribes onto reservations.
- **The Massacre:** On November 29, 1864, a Colorado militia attacked a peaceful Cheyenne village, killing around 150 people, including women and children. This tragic event fueled anger among

Native tribes and is remembered as a pivotal moment in Cheyenne history.

Forced Relocation and Treaties

Following the Sand Creek Massacre, the U.S. government sought to control the Cheyenne through a series of treaties and forced relocations.

Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868)

- Establishment of a Reservation: This treaty recognized the Cheyenne's right to their lands and established the Great Sioux Reservation. However, it was soon disregarded due to gold discoveries in the Black Hills.
- Impact: The Cheyenne were forced to relocate multiple times, leading to a loss of traditional lands and resources.

Continued Struggles

- The Battle of the Rosebud (1876): This battle was part of the Great Sioux War, where Cheyenne and Lakota forces resisted U.S. encroachment.
- The Battle of Little Bighorn (1876): The Cheyenne allied with the Lakota in this famous battle, achieving a significant victory against General Custer's forces.

20th Century and Modern Era

The 20th century brought new challenges and changes to the Cheyenne tribe.

Assimilation Policies

- Dawes Act (1887): This act aimed to assimilate Native Americans into American society by allotting them individual plots of land. The Cheyenne lost much of their communal land due to this policy.
- Cultural Suppression: Efforts were made to suppress Cheyenne culture, language, and traditions during this period, leading to a decline in cultural practices.

Revival and Recognition

- Cultural Renaissance: In the latter half of the 20th century, there was a resurgence of interest in Cheyenne culture, language, and traditions. Efforts were made to revitalize their heritage through education and community programs.
- Federal Recognition: The Northern Cheyenne Tribe was officially recognized by the U.S.

government in 1941. The Southern Cheyenne also gained recognition, and both groups have since worked towards self-governance and cultural preservation.

Contemporary Cheyenne Tribe

Today, the Cheyenne people continue to navigate the complexities of modern life while honoring their rich cultural heritage.

Political Structure and Governance

- Tribal Government: The Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council governs the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, focusing on community welfare, economic development, and cultural preservation.
- Advocacy: The Cheyenne have been actively involved in advocating for their rights and sovereignty, participating in broader movements for Native American rights across the United States.

Cultural Preservation and Education

- Language Revitalization: Programs aimed at preserving the Cheyenne language and teaching it to younger generations are in place to ensure the language survives.
- Cultural Events: Powwows, cultural festivals, and educational programs are held to celebrate and share Cheyenne traditions with both tribal members and the broader public.

Conclusion

The history of the Cheyenne tribe is a testament to their resilience and strength in the face of adversity. From their origins in the Great Lakes region to their nomadic lifestyle on the Great Plains, the Cheyenne have faced numerous challenges, including colonization, forced relocations, and cultural suppression. Despite these hardships, they have maintained their identity and continue to thrive in contemporary society. The ongoing efforts to preserve their language, culture, and traditions ensure that the legacy of the Cheyenne people will endure for future generations. Their story is not just a chapter in American history but a vital part of the narrative of Native American resilience and survival.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the origin of the Cheyenne tribe?

The Cheyenne tribe originated in the Great Lakes region and migrated to the Great Plains in the 18th century.

What were the primary subsistence practices of the Cheyenne?

The Cheyenne were primarily nomadic buffalo hunters and relied on bison for food, clothing, and shelter.

How did the Cheyenne tribe organize their society?

The Cheyenne society was organized into bands, each led by a chief, and they placed a strong emphasis on kinship and communal living.

What role did the Cheyenne play in the Plains Indian Wars?

The Cheyenne played a significant role in the Plains Indian Wars, particularly during conflicts such as the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864.

What is the significance of the Cheyenne warrior society?

The Cheyenne warrior society, known as the 'Dog Soldiers,' was crucial for protecting the tribe and maintained the cultural practices of bravery and honor.

How did European colonization impact the Cheyenne tribe?

European colonization led to loss of territory, resources, and traditional ways of life for the Cheyenne, resulting in significant social and cultural disruption.

What language do the Cheyenne people speak?

The Cheyenne people speak the Cheyenne language, which is a member of the Algonquian language family.

What is the present-day status of the Cheyenne tribe?

Today, the Cheyenne tribe is recognized by the federal government and has two main reservations in Montana and Wyoming, where they continue to preserve their culture.

How does the Cheyenne tribe celebrate its cultural heritage?

The Cheyenne tribe celebrates its cultural heritage through traditional ceremonies, powwows, and educational programs aimed at preserving their history and customs.

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