



Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes

Stan Hoig

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A Plains tribe that subsisted on the buffalo, the Cheyennes depended for survival on the valor and skill of their braves in the hunt and in battle. The fiery spirit of the young warriors was balanced by the calm wisdom of the tribal headmen, the peace chiefs, who met yearly as the Council of the Forty-four. "A Cheyenne chief was required to be a man of peace, to be brave, and to be of generous heart," writes Stan Hoig. "Of these qualities the first was unconditionally the most important, for upon it rested the moral restraint required for the warlike Cheyenne Nation."

As the Cheyennes began to feel the westward crush of white civilization in the nineteenth century, a great burden fell to the peace chiefs. Reconciliation with the whites was the tribe's only hope for survival, and the chiefs were the buffers between their own warriors and the United States military, who were out to "win the West." The chiefs found themselves struggling to maintain the integrity of their people—struggling against overwhelming military forces, against disease, against the debauchery brought by "firewater," and against the irreversible decline of their source of livelihood, the buffalo. They were trapped by history in a nearly impossible position. Their story is a heroic epic and, oftentimes, a tragedy.

No single book has dealt as intensively as this one with the institution of the peace chiefs. The author has gleaned significant material from all available published sources and from contemporary newspapers. A generous selection of photographs and extensive quotations from nineteenth-century observers add to the authenticity of the text. Following a brief analysis of the Sweet Medicine legend and its relation to the Council of the Forty-four, the more prominent nineteenth-century chiefs are treated individually in a lucid, felicitous style that will appeal to both students and lay readers of Indian history.

As adopted Cheyenne chief Boyce D. Timmons says in his preface to this volume, "Great wisdom, intellect, and love are expressed by the remarkable Cheyenne chiefs, and if you enter their tipi with an open heart and mind, you might have some understanding of the great 'Circle of Life.'"

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