

Until 1840 the bloodthirsty Kiowa had been mortal enemies of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, and always were hostile to the Sioux. They were forever raiding southward into Old and New Mexico, killing more white men in proportion to their small numbers than any other tribe.

Their allies the Kiowa-Apache, called Bad Hearts or Thieves, were so few they inclined to peace, but perforce joined the Kiowas in their wars.

The predatory Comanches were allied with their relatives, the Ute and Shoshone, and friendly with the Kiowa. They were long hostile to, but after 1840 friendly with, the Cheyenne and Arapaho. But for 200 years they had regularly raided far to the south of their home range, killing and robbing Spaniards, Mexicans, and Texans with complete impartiality.

In the face of such an array of bitter tribal enmities, many of them centuries old, it was hardly to be expected that peace would come to the nomadic Plains Indians through the mere flourish of a pen; more especially as personal vengeance was a religious duty and a social obligation. Moreover, in order to have any property, authority, prestige, or following — or even to marry — a Plains Indian had first to distinguish himself on the warpath. To prevent Plains Indians from making war on each other was as impossible, under their laws and customs, as it would be, in ~~any~~ capitalistic society, to keep white men from trying to make money.

Even so, the balance of power on the Plains might have remained fairly steady and without much blood shed but for the coming of the white man with his weapons, his wagons, his liquor, his diseases, his greed — and his good intentions.

The real concern of Uncle Sam in 1851 was to keep the Indians from attacking white men passing through their country — "to keep the road open." To do this meant maintaining an effective control over each tribe through whose domain the road passed. Such control could only be assured by vigorously supporting in good faith and with a show of ample force these chiefs who were friendly to the whites.