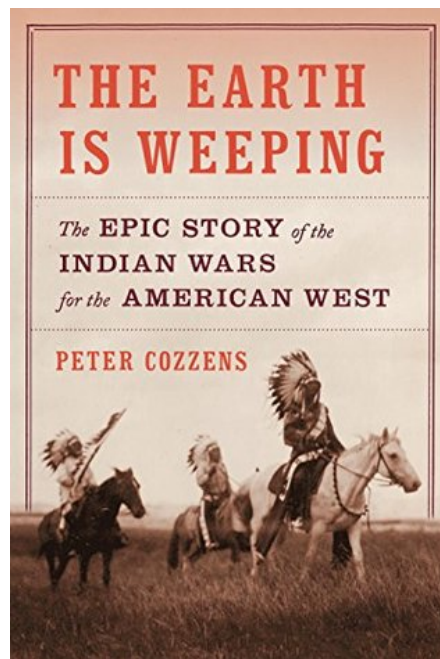




The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West

Peter Cozzens

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Bringing together a pageant of fascinating characters including Custer, Sherman, Grant, and a host of other military and political figures, as well as great native leaders such as Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, and Red Cloud, *The Earth is Weeping*—lauded by Booklist as “a beautifully written work of understanding and compassion”—is the fullest account to date of how the West was won...and lost.

"[S]ets a new standard for Western Indian Wars history..." —Stuart Rosebrook, *True West Magazine*

With the end of the Civil War, the nation recommenced its expansion onto traditional Indian tribal lands, setting off a wide-ranging conflict that would last more than three decades. In an exploration of the wars and negotiations that destroyed tribal ways of life even as they made possible the emergence of the modern United States, Peter Cozzens gives us both sides in comprehensive and singularly intimate detail. He illuminates the encroachment experienced by the tribes and the tribal conflicts over whether to fight or make peace, and explores the squalid lives of soldiers posted to the frontier and the ethical quandaries faced by generals who often sympathized with their native enemies.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West Details

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From Reader Review The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West for online ebook

Steve says

When I was young, THE book to read on the various American Indian wars was Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West. Everyone read it. It was one of those rare books that come along at point in history (1970, Vietnam, general civil unrest) that captures the imagination of an entire country. It was time and place thing.

Peter Cozzens, in his prologue, while acknowledging the passionate and elegant writing of Dee Brown, takes some issue with Brown's one-sided focus on the victimhood of the Indians. That sounds harsher as a statement than it is in execution. By book's end, you are still faced with the pathetic, and very avoidable, tragedy at Wounded Knee. By this point in history (1890), the very existence of the various tribes seems in doubt. Gone are the free riding warriors of the plains, hemmed in now by soldiers, towns, fences, and railroads. The warfare (often just massacres), sporadic in nature, was usually brutal, and by both sides. The Indians, usually outnumbered, more than held their own against U.S. troops (who were often poorly led raw recruits).

For the U.S. it would be the sheer numbers of settlers, coupled with a crushing anti-Indian policy, that would "win" the West. For the Indians, and this is a point of emphasis by Cozzens, their demise was guaranteed by their factiousness. They were often their own worst enemies. Essentially Indian vs. Indian. True, but given what they were up against, this seems a distinction without much of a difference. Greater unity may have bought time, but not much. Still, Cozzens is right to point these inner divisions, and he sticks with it throughout the book. I'm not sure that "The Earth is Weeping" is a replacement for "Bury My Heart," but they're two different books. I think they complement each other. Cozzens has written (beautifully) a standard history. Dee Brown's effort is an indictment. A timeless and still necessary one.

Jeff Francis says

Late in Peter Cozzens's "The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West," a passage describes how Sitting Bull—after having traveled the country with Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show in 1885—sought to debunk the notion that all white men universally worshiped the Great Father (the Indian name for whoever was the U.S. President):

First, Sitting Bull set his people straight on the Great Father. The agents had lied: white men did not hold the Great Father sacred. On the contrary, Sitting Bull told them, "half the people in the hotels were always making fun of him and trying to get him out of his place and some other man into his place." As for members of Congress, "they loved their whores more than their wives." And like most white men, they drank too much. (p. 436)

"The Earth is Weeping" seeks to be the new definitive history of what is considered one of America's major conflicts. Cozzens states in the introduction that he wants to bring a needed balance to the Indian Wars narrative. Because of the seminal "Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee" (1970), Cozzens writes, the pendulum of American perception has swung toward thinking that the white man was uniformly evil toward the Indians, or that there was a unified Indian opposition to the white man. As is often the case with history, it's

more complicated than that.

As a reading experience, "The Earth Is Weeping" is satisfying. Intensely researched and generously written, the narrative can be repetitive, but necessarily so (there are so many tribes and battles described that it's hard to keep them straight, much less the complex and often shifting alliances). Cozzens highlights dozens of characters from both sides, but reserves special attention for A-listers such as Custer, Geronimo, Crazy Horse and the aforementioned Sitting Bull.

Anyone unfamiliar with the Indian Wars will also be struck by the atrocity of the conflicts. The wars were essentially a series of reprisals for increasingly violent acts. Indians are slaughtered inhumanely at places such as Sand Creek and Wounded Knee, while other Indians torture white travelers and U.S. soldiers, even violating the taboo of corpse defilement (e.g., some Indian women would cut the penises off fallen soldiers and stuff them into the soldiers' mouths). Indeed, before going into battle against the Indians, U.S. soldiers were told, 'Save the last bullet for yourself,' and it was meant literally.

So if you're at all interested in this period of American history, it's hard to see how you would be disappointed by "The Earth is Weeping." Apart from its many other achievements, in the end TEIW reinforces the truism that we shouldn't reduce the past to black-and-white moral judgments.

Kurt says

Colonel John Gibbon, a significant participant in the wars that the United States waged against its native inhabitants, wrote about them in 1875:

Put yourself in his place and let the white man ask himself the question, What would I do if treated as the Indian has been and is? Suppose a race superior to mine were to land upon the shores of this great continent, trade or cheat us out of our land foot by foot, gradually encroach upon our domain until we were finally driven, a degraded demoralized band, into a small corner of the continent, where to live at all it was necessary to steal, perhaps to do worse? Suppose that in a spirit of justice, this superior race should recognize the fact that it was in duty bound to place food in our mouths and blankets on our backs, what would we do in the premises? I have seen one who hates an Indian as he does a snake, and thinks there is no good Indian but a dead one, on having the proposition put to him in this way, grind his teeth in rage and exclaim, "I would cut the heart out of every one I could lay my hands on," and so he would; and so we all would.

The same sentiment has been expressed by other military officers of note who, like Gibbon, mercilessly pursued, hounded, persecuted, and indiscriminately killed men, women, and children — people who, in most cases, were merely attempting to live the way of life their centuries-old customs and culture dictated, while resisting the forces that were coercing them to abandon all of it. Being military men, of course, they were trained to unquestionably obey orders. They were also men of extreme ambition, who knew that successful military campaigns inevitably led to military, social, and (often) political advancement.

The question I keep asking myself, over and over again, every time I read another book on Native American history (66 books now, counting this one) is: How could these men live with themselves? Were they lacking a conscience?

It seems that with every book I read on this subject the more cynical I become and the more hopeless I feel about humanity today as I realize that we are no different than the people of former times. Also as I read

these books I find myself hoping that, maybe, by some miracle, upon this reading of these struggles, the outcomes just might turn out a little bit better. Of course, they never do. Maybe it is time for me to take up a different subject to study.

This book was very good at describing most of the significant Indian conflicts in the years that followed the American Civil War. It contains more detail than most other similar comprehensive books, but (obviously) less detail than books written about specific conflicts. It must have been difficult for the author to decide upon the right amount. At some points I felt too much was omitted, at other times I felt that too much was included. Overall, it is a commendable work which I would recommend to anyone with an interest in the subject. For those who are completely new to the subject, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* might be a better choice.

Bill Yeadon says

I am not sure why I continue reading books on Indian history as I am always so sad upon completion. The author started the book with an interesting comment. he stated that for most of the 19th and 20th century most people sided with the white people, but in 1970 Dee Brown wrote *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and the movie *Little Big Man* was released. The tide turned and now most people felt the Indians were treated horribly. It appeared more like genocide.

Having grown up with Westerns and shows like *Rin Tin Tin* I thought the Indians did nothing but attack wagon trains and kill people. And every movie about Custer showed to him to be a tragic figure. But Dee Brown's book was my first book on Indians and *Little Big Man* has always been a favorite movie of mine. And I had learned that Custer was a raging egomaniac.

The Earth is Weeping is a very balanced history of the period from the mid-1800's to the battle of Wounded Knee. For a change, there is a lot more information on Indian chiefs outside of the usual Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, Cochise, and Geronimo.

One aspect that I picked up was if the various tribes had ever stood together and fought the white onslaught it may have taken into the 20th century for their final subjugation. Unfortunately, the tribes had been fighting each other for a century before the white man appeared.

Mike Kershaw says

“Between a Rock and a Hard Place”, Book review of Peter Cozzens’s, *The Earth is Weeping* by Colonel (ret) Mike Kershaw. For those who have found themselves at cross-purposes with their mission, in this most recent conflict, you might appreciate Peter Cozzens’ perspective of the US Army in its conflict with the Plains Indians in the post-Civil War period. Peter Cozzens is a Foreign Service officer who has written previously on the Civil War but recently turned his attention to various aspects of the Indian Wars. He begins his account with a brief pre-Civil War synopsis, beginning in earnest in 1865 and continues his narrative through the incident at Wounded Knee. He assesses both the Army and the various tribes it struggled with, the leaders on both sides and enough of engagements to give structure to his sweeping history of the campaign. Along the way, he overturns much of the conventional wisdom that has crept into our understanding of this conflict in a manner that is both engaging and discerning. The Army and the Indian Tribes. Anyone who visits the Custer Battlefield (The Little Bighorn National

Battlefield) soon realizes that it is situated in the middle of a reservation (the Trading Post right outside the entrance to the Park is a favorite lunch stop on our annual hunting trip to Montana). What is often lost on many is that it isn't the reservation of either the Cheyenne or the Sioux, the two primary tribes Custer pursued during the Centennial Campaign of 1876. In fact, it sits in the middle of the Crow Reservation, the long-time enemy of the Sioux who'd allied themselves with the Army and provided the Scouts which led the 7th Cavalry to their destiny that day. This often overlooked struggle between tribes – the Sioux were long time aggressors in their conflict with the Crow and in large part drove them into the army of the Army – is used by Cozzens throughout this volume as a critical aspect of this campaign.

Among the shibboleths he sets out to overturn, is that the Army was the implacable foe of the Plains Indian. He characterizes the post-Civil War, demobilized Army as taxed by an unpopular reconstruction campaign, devoid of volunteers and subject to internecine warfare among the various factions of its officer corps. Suffering an early setback in the Red Cloud War against the northern plains Indians, the reasons cited by the Army for its withdrawal from the Bozeman trail would be familiar to any officer today who has experienced the frustration of conducting pacification campaigns in either the Hindu Kush or the Euphrates River valley on a shoestring. The Plains Indians were superior warriors in almost every respect; horsemanship, field craft and initiative. The Army's superior organization, firepower and resources were at first, difficult to apply in large part because leaders struggled to realistically assess their opponents, the terrain and political situation in which they operated. It's hard to escape the conclusion that, in the end, the Army's withdrawal in the Red Cloud campaign was in large part due to the lack of political will manifested in inadequate support. Further south, however, Cozzens demonstrates the Army was having success.

The tale of Quanah Parker and the subjugation of the Comanche's has been elsewhere engagingly told in SC Gwynn's, *Empire of the Southern Moon*. Cozzens treatment of this critical campaign is in part stilted by his methodology, focusing on the US Army's post-Civil War efforts. The campaigns against both the Comanche's and Apaches had preceded the War Between the States and, in this period, the frontier was rolled back effectively by the Comanche's. Cozzens picks up this campaign as it is prosecuted against the Comanche's in the post-Civil War and the US Army balances the competing requirements of frontier defense with reconstruction and applies its lessons learned in this hard-fought struggle with success.

Leadership. Cozzens examines leaders on both sides of the conflict, at the strategic/political, operational and tactical levels. Through an examination of key personalities and engagements, including some lesser known campaigns and personalities, he resists the impulse to readdress already well-covered ground. In other words, you won't find any revisionist history of how Custer met his fate at Little Bighorn. From the Army's perspective he covers key operational commanders, Terry, Crook, Miles and Canby as well as its tactical leaders, McKinzie, Custer and Meritt, among others and offers an assessment of their performance within the context of the post-Civil War Army. Probably not surprising to most combat experienced officers, many with great reputations from the Civil War are proved wanting while others excel. Furthermore, he parses out performance during the various campaigns, pointing out where some otherwise successful commanders either failed to live up to their 'press' or reputations or otherwise failed to perform in a role for which they were unsuited. In an era of scarce resources and slow promotion, he demonstrates that self-promotion was endemic and cronyism rampant but neither was sufficient for competence. He similarly addresses the leaders of the various tribes and in a similar vein, avoids the tendency of many to romanticize the combatants. He gives similar treatment to the plains Indians leadership – Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and any others -- following key tribal leaders throughout his story. However, he points out, the characteristics of their society which produced such proficient warriors inevitably made their leaders efforts more challenging. Their individuality, egalitarianism and informal fighting methods made concerted and sustained military efforts almost impossible.

Clausewitz comes home to roost. While the Plains Indians could counter the resource and manpower superiority of the Army with superior warriors and terrain knowledge, ultimately the superior political system triumphed. As Cozzens points out, young warriors gained the most distinction in solo combat ('counting coup') not against Soldiers but rather against their tribal foes. These inherent inducements for the tribes to fight each other made central political direction almost impossible and alliances temporal. The Army exploited this, reluctantly at first, but to great advantage as the campaigns dragged on. There were peace factions in every tribe, Cozzens points out and the Crows, Pawnees and Shoshones were just the three

most prominent tribes to ally their interests with the Army's. Crook's adage that, '...the best way to find an Indian was with another Indian' therefore wasn't just a tactical precept, but an indication of a superior strategy. In a quote that made its way onto many battalion and brigade headquarters in this most recent conflict, "...it breaks down their way of life" is perhaps the most telling. And while the Army eventually will employ Indians in mass against each other, in an Army racked by desertion and in morally uncertain times, we can't find even a platoon of "San Patricio's" (1) among the tribal ranks (other than Lieutenant Dunbar (aka Kevin Costner)) in "Dances with Wolves" (2).

The political dilemma faced by the Army was often well behind the frontier. As Grant, Sherman and Sheridan attempt to resource a strategy and fight the policy battles – who would administer the Indians, for example – the Army's leadership in the field struggled with corruption in the Indian Bureau, policed settlers encroaching on land set aside for tribes and battled with local civilian leadership intolerant of Indian misdeeds. In this example, which made up the vast majority of the Army's activities, he places the Army squarely between the Indians and the US government and her land hungry people. Military officers were often the loudest and most effective advocates for the tribes. In the end, the railways and their accompanying swarm of settlers and buffalo hunters spelled the demise of the plains Indians.

If Cozzens book suffers from any weaknesses, it is primarily from structure – his focus on the northern plains Indians at the expense of Comanche's (Texas) is largely due to the methodology of dividing the campaign with the Civil War (a division most historians follow). But this is a minor criticism – this ground is well-covered by, among others, Robert Utley, in *Frontier Regulars*. His buttresses this by including many lesser known tribes, the Utes, Modoc and Nez Perc among others, whose conflicts generally serve as footnotes to the more well-known campaigns against the Sioux and Cheyenne. For those unfamiliar with these campaigns or with only a cursory knowledge, it will both entertain and inform. For those of us who have fought in our most recent COIN-type campaigns, the "Mark Twain" or "Rock Soup" strategies of poverty will be familiar. For those who have studied these struggles, it will help bring together many of the disparate challenges faced by the Frontier Army and hopefully lead us to more carefully study our past. .

(1) "San Patricio's" – the largely Irish contingent of US deserters that fought alongside the Mexican Army during the Mexican-American War.

(2) A movie ironically based on a novel about the Comanche. I guess Costner couldn't find a ranch in Texas.

Matt says

It was the fourth day after Christmas in the Year of Our Lord 1890. When the first torn and bleeding bodies were carried into the candlelit church, those who were conscious could see Christmas greenery hanging from the open rafters. Across the chancel front above the pulpit was strung a crudely lettered banner: PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN.

-- closing lines of Dee Brown's *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*

Peter Cozzens *The Earth is Weeping* is one of the finest books on the Indian Wars I've ever read. I feel comfortable stating that it is comparable to Dee Brown's classic *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Though it does not have quite the polemical force of Brown's work, *The Earth is Weeping* matches it in terms of gripping storytelling, and surpasses it in terms of historical research and rigor. I can't recommend it enough, whether you are a longtime student of the Indian Wars, or a newcomer to this quintessential American saga.

The Earth is Weeping is a narrative history of the Indian Wars of the American West. The first chapter is devoted to a sweeping survey that serves more to set the table for events to come. It covers, in broad strokes, the Grattan Massacre in 1854, the First Sioux War of 1855, the Dakota Uprising of 1862, and the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864. Cozzens sketches these events, but does not give them a thorough airing. The true starting

point is 1866, with Red Cloud's War along the Bozeman Trail. In December of that year, 81 soldiers (along with a couple civilian guides, hoping to test out their fancy Henry repeaters) were slaughtered by a Lakota-Cheyenne coalition in the cold and snow of present-day Wyoming. The tale ends in 1890, at another vicious winter bloodletting, this one along a creek called the Wounded Knee. Between those bloody bookends is a tale that deserves the appellation "epic" given in the subtitle.

This is primarily a military history, focusing on the battles and massacres, the raids and ambushes, that marked America's post-Civil War westward surge. The battles of the Indian Wars do not compare to other 19th century conflicts, and certainly not the titanic clashes between Union and Confederacy. Many fights were marked by a lot of shooting, a lot of yelling, and relatively few casualties. The six-hour fight on the Rosebud, for instance, resulted in a total of around 200 casualties for both sides (using high estimates). That's a couple minutes in Devil's Den at Gettysburg. But Civil War battles were marked by their impersonality. Huge masses faced off and fired blindly in smoke so thick that officers got on their hands and knees to see below it. The Indian Wars, by contrast, were often intimate in their violence. There is a Homeric aspect to the combat, as named participants face off in lethal individual contests.

Take, for instance, the Fetterman Fight, where American troopers plunged into an cleverly-laid trap and were wiped out:

Resistance from the infantry might have been minimal; the young Oglala chief American Horse said that many soldiers appeared to be paralyzed with fear. It soon turned into the sort of close-order combat the Lakotas called "stirring gravy." As infantrymen fell with arrow wounds, dismounted warriors descended upon them, first counting coup and then smashing their skulls with war clubs. American Horse landed [Captain William Judd] Fetterman a disabling blow and then cut his throat, while the officer who had bragged about taking Red Cloud's scalp shot himself in the temple. The infantry and the cavalry fought and died apart. [Lieutenant George Washington] Grummond fell early, decapitating a warrior with his sword before a blow from a war club dropped [him]...

Or the murder of General R.S. Canby by the Modoc Captain Jack:

Captain Jack snapped his revolver in Canby's face, but the cap popped harmlessly. As Canby stood frozen, Captain Jack cocked the hammer again and shot him through his left eye. To everyone's amazement, the mortally wounded general rose to his feet and ran forty or fifty yards until Captain Jack and the warrior Ellen's Man caught up with him. Ellen's Man shoved his rifle against Canby's head and fired, and Captain Jack stabbed Canby in the throat for good measure.

By starting in 1866, Cozzens isn't as comprehensive as Dee Brown. The Long Walk of the Navajo, for instance, does not make the cutoff. That said, this is a big book, with 467 pages of text, and he is able to cover a lot of ground. Some of it is familiar. The name George Armstrong Custer pops up a lot. Other stories, though, have been sadly under-told until now. Cozzens devotes an entire chapter to the nasty little Modoc war in the lava beds of California and Oregon. Another chapter is given to the Utes, who were doomed by a mentally unstable Indian Agent. Cozzens also finds time to relate the obscure Marias River Massacre, in which a drunk cavalry officer butchered a band of innocent Piegiens, running up a blood-tally comparable to Sand Creek.

There are tradeoffs, of course. Quanah Parker, the Comanche, and the Red River War only rank one chapter, while the saga of the Apache is given at least three dedicated sections (covering Cochise, Victorio, and Geronimo). This is to be expected, unless you want a thousand page book. (For the record, I wish this had been a thousand pages).

Cozzens does not neglect the shameful diplomatic relations between whites and Indians. He works this thread into every single chapter. Surprisingly, given how good he is at the military side, my favorite part of the book might have been the last two chapters on the final collapse of the Lakota. The Lakota were never conquered in battle; instead, they were riven by internecine power struggles stoked by the whites. "Peace chiefs" such as Red Cloud (once a ferocious warrior who held up his bargain after the Laramie Treaty of 1868) were pitted against "hostiles" such as Sitting Bull, who still clung to the old ways. The devious results will be familiar to anyone who has read *A Song of Ice and Fire*. It is a telling demonstration of the effectiveness of divide-and-conquer that Crazy Horse was stabbed while held by his old friend, Little Big Man, and that Sitting Bull was murdered by Lakota police.

Though it's not Cozzens's focus, ample space is given to the failures of Grant's well-intentioned but fatally flawed "Peace Policy," the graft and corruption of the Office of Indian Affairs, the consistently broken or unfulfilled treaties, and the final indignity of the Dawes Act. Cozzens avoids easy stereotypes, and refuses to categorize things as "good" or "evil." Men like General Nelson Miles are presented in all their contradictions, the venality, naked ambition, and mercilessness sitting right alongside pity and solicitude.

My criticisms are half-hearted and minor. I wish Cozzens had more space to devote to the differences between the individual tribes. It's asking a bit much to request anthropological discussions on top of the military and political history that is provided, but I'm greedy. I also disliked Cozzens's habit of (at times) not naming individuals within the narrative. Too often he refers to "an Indian warrior" or a "young officer" or something vague of that nature, rather than simply using that person's name. I would often have to flip to the Notes to try to discern who Cozzens was talking about. (In the first excerpt above, the arrogant officer who killed himself at the Fetterman Fight was Fred Brown. Is it that hard to give him a name?)

Since this is narrative history, Cozzens is presenting his interpretation of events. He is not weighing or analyzing evidence. This will be jarring to some students of the Indian Wars. Take the Battle of the Little Big Horn, also known as Custer's Last Stand. By my last count, there are approximately one billion theories about "Custer's Last Stand." Cozzens does not have the time or inclination to parse the near-infinite premises. Instead, he presents his single version of how things went down. I've already noticed some Custer-pedants dismissing the entire work because Cozzens does not adhere to their personal views. Now, I don't agree with Cozzens on every aspect. But he always remains within the evidence, and does a laudable job avoiding the romances and myths that surround the American West.

Did I mention there are 19 maps, 3 different photo insets, and a timeline? Christmas came early with this volume.

Slavery and the dispossession of the Indians are the two foundations upon which America was built. This is a discomfiting reality. This discomfort results in pushback. Accordingly, some writers and historians have attempted to rationalize the actions of soldiers, settlers, and politicians during America's western push. Others have tried to minimize the damage done to the tribes. I've read books arguing that massacres perpetrated by whites weren't massacres at all (see, e.g., Sand Creek); I've seen a crude *tu quoque* defense positing that Indian depredations were as bad as white depredations, and that the two cancel out; I've seen it written that we should spare no sorrow for the Indians, since they were engaging in warfare long before the whites arrived.

Dee Brown's masterpiece was written in response to this nonsense. *The Earth is Weeping* arrives at the same place in much more subtle fashion. Cozzens doesn't need to argue, he only needs to tell. By the end, we have

witnessed a culture obliterated root and branch, not just annihilated bodily in their sleeping villages, but as a civilization as well. Land taken. Food sources destroyed. Traditional patterns disrupted. Social, political, and religious structures dismantled. The long continental struggle that ended on the red-stained snow at Wounded Knee contains all the drama that Shakespeare and the Greeks ever sought. There is bloodshed and betrayal; there are heroes, villains, and cowards; there are chases and escapes; there are lies and deceptions; and there is tragedy, the soul of the plot.

Christopher Saunders says

Cozzens, a veteran Civil War historian, turns his attentions to America's bloody twilight wars against Native Americans between 1865 and 1890. It's the tragic stuff of legends, movies and a million history works, yet Cozzens manages to make the familiar topic fresh and invigorating again. He crisply recounts battles and personalities both familiar (Custer's Last Stand, Geronimo's Apache terror campaign) and obscure (California's Modoc War, the extirpation of the Utes) while offering often-penetrating insight into the wars' causes and execution. To the extent there's a central thesis, Cozzens argues that military leaders actually opposing Indians were, for the most part, sympathetic to their cause, pragmatic in their dealings and often shamed and insulted by the policies they were forced to carry out. Hence much-maligned figures like George Crook, Nelson Miles and even Custer receive sympathetic treatment (not so much Sheridan and Sherman). He also presents the Indians as hopelessly divided in their response to the whites, some fighting back, others urging assimilation, still more siding with the whites against holdouts, without the value judgments of, say, Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. The real villains are Washington politicians (Ulysses Grant, often lauded for his supposedly pro-Indian views, comes in for particular drubbing) more concerned about executing policy, greedy territorial governors, Indian agents and lawmen who openly abuse and betray their charges. One might dispute Cozzens' characterizations, but his vivid portrait is thorough, compelling and ultimately tragic.

Cory says

A disappointing way to end the year. The book markets itself (in the preface) as a correction to "*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*," saying it will tell the story of the "Indian Wars" out West from a balanced "both sides" perspective. Unfortunately, it ends up doing nothing of the sort.

First, the good: from a military history perspective, this book has done a good job summarizing the various movements of forces and battles that led to Native Americans being entirely dispossessed of their land and forced onto reservations. Cozzens also appropriately condemns American perfidy and brutality in all the many places it crops up without idealizing every action of the Native Americans (though appropriately noting that they were far more sinned against than sinning).

Still, this is where the good parts end. It's not really much of a history or story as much as a military summary. The detailed parts of the book are pretty telling. We hear best guesses for a lot of the action in some of the battles ("X fired his gun taking down two others before being wounded in the...") and sometimes even US (white) military generals opining on various topics. Native American voices are present in summarizing the battles or lamenting their position, but they still end up being largely one-dimensional. For example, the Kiowa chief Kicking Bird comes up at a number of points throughout the story and it's mentioned he is pro-peace. But... why? What of the many good reasons to pursue peace did Kicking Bird have? What was he like as a person?

The book similarly lacks a broad perspective on all cultures, especially Native American ones. The Comanche are simply "a cruel people" (broad brush much?). Also annoying, Cozzens, for reasons that I don't understand, prefers to use the term "Indians" not "Native Americans" without seeming to spend much thought on it. Also the stupid audiobook reader kept mispronouncing names like saying "Shoshones" as "Show-SHOWNS." There's little reflection on how the momentous events depicted shaped Native American or US American cultures, other than the most obvious notes that Native Americans were forced onto reservations and adopted agriculture (or tried). These comically broad-brush statements reveal little except to contrast with the exceptional detail and exhilaration devoted to the battles.

Come to think of it, even this is exaggerated. At least in (e.g.) the US civil war the fights are appropriately epic. Here, it is more often than not a story of the US cavalry chasing down a few hundred starving people (including civilians/women/children) across the plains. Big whoop.

The book set a laudable and necessary goal but seems to have been sidetracked by the author's delight for "cowboys vs Indians"-type storytelling.

Richard says

A truly wonderful book depicting the murder of native americans by the U.S. government. No one ever mentions " genocide ", but it truly was. The white man systematically wiped out scores of Indians from North America. The U.S. never acknowledges this and to this day think that they are the superior nation on earth. They scorched and burned the Middle East and left it in chaos and now they are pivoting to Asia. We f*cked up the Middle East and now let's do that to Asia. Wonderful country **sarcasm**.

Michael says

A balanced and engaging read. Cozzens' sweeping account covers all the main campaigns and major battles, but what makes his book unique is its focus on the impact of both internal tribal factionalism and inter-tribal conflict on the inevitable outcome. If you are looking for the definitive one-volume overview of United States' conquest of the American West (1860-1891), in my opinion this is it.

Larry Bassett says

this book starts out with a statement from the author that suggests that the book Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee has been the only substantial book about Indian history for many years. But he asserts that book was told solely from the point of view of the Indian and is thus biased. His book on the other hand has used primary source material that allows him to present native American history more accurately. The last quarter of this book is footnotes making it clear he has tried to back up his claim.

I would say this book is about 80% about native Americans fighting white settlers and US Army's. You can't paint an entire people with a single broad brush. There were good and bad Indians and good and bad white men. They are named in this book. But let's be real. Native Americans made their homes on the North American continent before all the rest of us came here. They were pushed off their land over and over and over. Doesn't that make it pretty clear who the bad guys were?

There is an incredible amount of blood shed in this book. Apparently President Grant tried to treat the Indians well. Others at many levels of government also occasionally tried to be just and fair. But the country has still wound up where it is today with Indians being in fairly desperate circumstances.

The following paragraph comes at the end of the book. It does pretty much wrap things up. I felt quite pummeled by the time I got to the end of the book.

"Those times seemed but a distant memory. In fact, the transformation of the Lakota world, and of the Indian West, had come in the blink of an eye. Less than a generation had passed since Red Cloud had won his war on the Bozeman Trail forts but then gradually lost the peace. The Lakotas had held the Crow lands they had conquered for less than a decade. It had been just fifteen years since the great but ultimately Pyrrhic Indian victory at the Little Bighorn. Now nothing remained. The Lakotas, the Cheyennes, the Arapahos, the Nez Perces, the Utes, the Modocs, the Apaches, and even some Texan-hating Kiowas and Comanches had tried to coexist amicably with the white man, but he would not be peaceably contained. Tribes had divided bitterly over the issue of war or peace. The Indians who had gone to war against the government had usually done so reluctantly, and they had lost their land and their way of life anyway. Accommodation had failed. War had failed. And the bullet-riven Ghost Shirts buried with their wearers in the mass grave on the lone knoll above Wounded Knee Creek were ample proof that religion too had failed the Indians. There was no room left for the Indians in the West but what the government saw fit to permit them. One elderly Lakota chief who had witnessed the march of events from the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851 to the tragedy at Wounded Knee four decades later saw nothing remarkable in what had transpired. "The [government] made us many promises," he told a white friend, "more than I can remember, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land, and they took it."

James Murphy says

Story is an important word in the title. The Earth Is Weeping is history and good history, but there's much more narrative, description, and biographical portrait than there is analysis. This story has been told before but perhaps not with this clarity and understanding of the cultures in such frictioned contact that it resulted in the death of one and the rush to greatness of the other. Cozzens demonstrates that the result couldn't have been any other than the one we know.

We learn early on that the author intended his history to offset the influence and distorted picture created by the popular Dee Brown history *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Nevertheless, many of these familiar episodes he tells about show the United States in a poor light in their treatment of the native population. However, he emphasizes, most of the Army's senior command understood the hopeless situation the Indians faced and sympathized with them. Those who mistreated the various tribes and hastened the end of their way of life were the Indian agencies and those who worked in the Department of the Interior.

Cozzens doesn't make a case for the disparity in population sizes between the Indian and European societies being a factor, or the fact that the United States felt it had a right and a national imperative to expand to the Pacific. It's implied. The railroads are cited as a direct cause and so are the economics of buffalo hides which destroyed the Indian primary natural resource. In Cozzens's telling there was no deliberate destruction of the buffalo herds and therefore the Indian way of life. There's no mention of distribution of blankets infected with smallpox. I don't remember the word genocide being used. Most importantly, in the end the Indians were unable to deflect the changes forced on them by an expanding United States and the loss of the buffalo. They could no longer resist. Given the nature of the 2 societies in contact across the west and given the advantages of American technological complexity, what else could have happened? What's probably true is that you can read 30 books about the subject and not arrive at the ultimate truth. However, I think with this

clear, understanding, and comprehensive account of the 2 cultures in contact Cozzens has come closer to the truth than Dee Brown. This is the history of the Indian wars of the west for our time.

Charles says

“The Earth Is Weeping” offers an almost painfully even-handed look at the conflicts between the United States and American Indian tribes after the Civil War. Of course, given the historiography of the past fifty years, an even-handed look necessarily inverts the traditional narrative. Here, Team Indian does good and bad, and Team White does good and bad, each according to its own internal dictates of morality and external dictates of practicality and need. The Sioux are expelled from their land—which they conquered only ten years before by slaughtering the previous inhabitants with extreme brutality. The white man (and the Mexican, and the white man’s numerous Indian allies) usually breaks treaties and sometimes kills women and children. Here is no morality tale, but the old and inevitable tale of nomad vs. nomad vs. state—new, perhaps, in Sumer, but not new in 1870.

Cozzens is a well-known expert on American warfare of the Civil War period. This military history covers the period from 1866, beginning with Red Cloud’s War in Montana Territory, until 1891, the final suppression of the Sioux as an independent nation. The book is chronologically organized, and within the chronology, focuses on a variety of tribes, some better known than others because of their role in past and present popular culture, from Custer’s Last Stand to Dances With Wolves. It contains excellent maps that are a great help to the reader, both in understanding the geography of the land and the geography of Indian tribes. Cozzens’s writing is crisp, clear, and to the point, so although the book is fairly long, the reader never feels like the narrative drags—perhaps, in part, because the reader knows that around the next corner is another tragedy.

This is a history of “the Indian Wars for the American West,” so nothing is said about earlier Indian wars, either with the Spanish in the southern part of what is now the United States, or colonial conflicts with the Eastern tribes such as the Five Nations. The usual narrative of the Western Indian wars is filled with propaganda and ignorance, in earlier years driven by the call of Manifest Destiny and the myth of the savage, noble or otherwise; in later years by oppression theory and ethnic nationalist movements such as AIM. Cozzens denies all these simplistic narratives. In his Prologue he explicitly rejects Dee Brown’s famous and influential 1970 book, “Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee,” which convinced a generation that the Indian wars were exemplars of good vs. evil, with the white man in the role of the Devil, bent on genocide. (Of course, it is only Western Christian societies that have ever agonized over the treatment meted out to indigenous inhabitants, from Bartolomé de las Casas onwards, so at least Brown is in good company.) Cozzens passes judgment on Brown by declaring “It is at once ironic and unique that so crucial a period of our history remains largely defined by a work that made no attempt at historical balance.” (Brown’s book thereby resembles Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring,” a propaganda work ideally fitted for its time, in which a core of truth was wrapped in a tissue of emotionally laden lies, thus distorting rational discourse for decades. But at least Brown’s book didn’t kill millions of people in the Third World, as Carson’s did, by demonizing safe and effective pesticides such as DDT.) Cozzens’s goal is therefore to offer a “thorough and nuanced understanding” of both the Indian and white perspective, at which he succeeds admirably.

Perhaps the most basic point Cozzens makes in opposition to the traditional narrative is that the wars between the Indians and the United States in the West were actually “a clash of emigrant peoples.” Almost all of the Western Indian tribes had only recently conquered the territories they held, and therefore their immediate concern was often preventing the attacks of local enemies—the white man seemed small in numbers and far away, until he didn’t. In this and in every other way the book rejects oversimplification and stereotypes, instead showing the rich texture of personalities created by the individuals involved, with their

vices and virtues thrown into sharp relief by what was demanded of them.

Still, certain general types of relevant individuals can be discerned across time and space. On the Indian side, of those opposed to the white man (many Indian tribes simply accepted the inevitable and did not fight, or fought with the white man), there was always division between the firebrands and the accommodationists, of which the United States easily took advantage. When they fought, the Indians were “among the best soldiers man for man in the world”—but they did not fight unified, and their tactics were generally poor against regular military units (although their weapons were usually modern, and often more modern than those issued to the Army). On the side of the United States, there were some (a small but vocal minority, and over-emphasized today) who were effectively in favor of Indian extermination. The largest group, including most men in Congress and most Presidents, tended to view the Indians as children, and merely wanted the Indians out of the way, with as little ill treatment as possible—but with no actual parental feeling or actions. And there was another small group (mostly, as with abolitionists, driven by Christianity) who demanded equitable treatment for the Indians—among these were a surprising number of military officers, though they were often constrained by the chain of command to treat Indians in ways they found personally repugnant.

The inability of the Indian tribes to act together for their joint benefit, even within a single tribe, is a constant theme in this history. Most Indian societies (as with all nomads throughout history) were highly individualistic, sharply limiting the authority of chiefs, as well as the length of time they might hold authority. There was “no common identity—no sense of ‘Indianness’—and [they] were too busy fighting one another to give their undivided attention to the new threat [of the white man].” Only a few Indian leaders could persuade their own tribe to act together for long, and fewer still had any success in holding multiple tribes together, even those with common ancestry. The most famous success at an Indian confederation, not covered in this book, was Tecumseh; here, Sitting Bull is the only similarly successful leader. The Indians also had many cultural differences that exacerbated inter-tribal rivalries and hatreds. To take only a small example, though one the subject of a common stereotype, Plains Indians were big on risky displays of individual bravery, such as counting coup (even if usually counting coup with a feather or quirt was immediately followed by killing an enemy with a stone club). But the Apache were not interested in this at all, and preferred to kill by stealth.

Cozzens begins his narrative with a poignant story of the Southern Cheyenne chief Long Bear, invited to Washington to meet with Abraham Lincoln, who treated him politely, if condescendingly, and gave him bronze peace medals and papers attesting to friendship. Long Bear toured New York City and met various influential men; he was treated with respect, as he expected to be, since he was a chief just as Lincoln was. He returned to Colorado, and when soldiers approached his village, rode out to meet them, medals gleaming to show his friendship. They shot him. As General George Crook, who fought for the Army throughout this period, said, “[The Indians] are surrounded on all sides, the game is destroyed or driven away, they are left to starve, and there remains but one thing for them to do—fight while they can. Our treatment of the Indian is an outrage.” No doubt it was—but, perhaps, in an expansionist society confident of its destiny, it was also inevitable. Cozzens never says this, but he does frame the conflict thus: “[T]he federal government never contemplated genocide. That the Indian way of life must be eradicated if the Indian were to survive, however, was taken for granted.”

The book turns first to Red Cloud’s War, one of the very few Indian successes, not coincidentally taking place in 1866, when the United States was still distracted by the aftermath of the Civil War, and white settlement of the Great Plains was just beginning. Red Cloud was an Oglala Sioux, with ties to the Brulé, each being one of the seven sub-tribes of the Sioux (the Lakota being the most famous today). (One thing that comes through very clearly is the tiny numbers of Western Indians—the Sioux, for example, never had more than five thousand warriors, even when all seven sub-tribes combined, which was rare in the extreme.) Red Cloud defeated the Crow, taking from them land guaranteed by a treaty earlier brokered by the United States. Then, together with elements of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, traditional Sioux allies, he defeated small elements of the US Army, including killing an entire detachment of eighty men, and cut off settler access to

the Bozeman Trail in Wyoming, which the Army was trying to keep open. The United States then made peace on terms that seemed favorable to Red Cloud—using a vague and hard-to-understand treaty which, as so often, was not understood in the same way by both sides, but which kept the peace for a time (and permanently cut off the Crow from their best hunting grounds).

Following chapters focus on the wars with the Cheyenne. Custer began his Indian-fighting career here, and this set of skirmishes and small battles ended badly for the Cheyenne. This included the 1868 Battle of Washita, where various outrages were committed by the Army and their Osage allies, resulting in heavy criticism back East. Criticism was exacerbated by Custer abandoning a group of troopers who had, unknown to Custer, already been killed to the last man, which lowered Custer's already low reputation among much of the Army. Next come the wars of the Comanche and Kiowa, inhabitants of the Southern Plains, involving the famous half-white Comanche war chief Quanah Parker (himself the subject of a recent biography).

These wars were conducted under the "Peace Policy" of President Grant, which basically consisted of being reasonably nice to the Indians, offering them "annuities" (money) and rations to substitute for the disappearing buffalo, as long as they showed movement toward adopting the settled ways of the white man, and of being nasty to them if they failed to do so. As with so much of Grant's administration, this policy was adversely affected by corruption, particularly in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The BIA proved usually unable to perform its functions, largely because everyone had his hand in the till. And it vied with the Army for primacy in administering relations with the Indians (who usually preferred the Army to administer relations in peacetime), a split of authority that frequently harmed the Indians. Moreover, members of the BIA were not above spreading lies about Indian violence where none existed in order to drum up Congressional appropriations, which could then be redirected into the pockets of Indian agents. At best, United States administration of peaceful Indian relations seems to have been mediocre, and often, it was awful, contributing to unrest among Indians otherwise peaceful, and strengthening the hand of the "war party" that was a major grouping among many Indian tribes.

Cozzens then switches to the Pacific Northwest, where the small Modoc tribe in Oregon fought rather than be forced onto reservations, using the rough volcanic terrain and their superior fighting skills to hold off the Army and kill quite a few soldiers before they were defeated. The Modoc War, which featured lowlights such as a Modoc chief shooting an American general in the face during a negotiation, for which he was hanged, whipped up anti-Indian sentiment and increased pressure on Grant to take a more aggressive stance toward the Indians in general. The Cheyenne wars continued, and violence flared up in Apache country, in Arizona and New Mexico. The latter also involved the Mexicans, because the Apache often raided across the border, or fled from one country to the other to escape the local army—and the Mexicans were even less accommodating of the Indians than the United States.

Much of the book is taken up with discussion of the Northern Plains, primarily the Sioux, with, naturally, quite a bit about Custer's destruction at Little Bighorn. As with so many Indian victories, however, the Indians were unable to follow up on the success, both because of disunity and because they conceptually did not view "victory" in the same way as the white man. And also as with any other Indian victory, the effect was to cause the United States to throw huge additional resources at defeating the Indians, and to undermine any nascent movements toward peaceable coexistence. Of course, incidents such as the Army destroying a group of Cheyenne warriors and recovering "a bag containing the severed right hands of twelve Shoshone babies" accelerated the feeling in the East that the free, or "non-treaty" (i.e., non-reservation) Indian could never co-exist with the United States. These Northern Plains battles, primarily against the Sioux, in the late 1870s, also featured the famous Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, as well as a cast of less famous characters.

Cozzens then switches gears, to the Nez Perce War in what is now Idaho and Montana. Like the Modoc, the Nez Perce were small in number, but made up for that in fighting competency. But the end was the same—most of the warriors dying, a few escaping to Canada, and the rest of the tribe becoming "treaty Indians." Their leader, Chief Joseph, fought in part to control the land where his people were buried,

declaring “A man who would not love his father’s grave is worse than a wild animal.” The story of the Utes, inhabitants of fastnesses in the Rocky Mountains, was much the same. I don’t mean to make these stories sound boring—they are not. They are tragic, but each story has a range of well-drawn personalities, each with his own motivations, foibles and virtues, and in their interaction the reader finds both interest and a repetition of timeless lessons about human nature.

Cozzens then returns to the Apaches and the Sioux. He covers Geronimo, who was widely regarded as courageous, but a nasty and untrustworthy drunk, by both Indians and whites, given even more than most Apaches to torture of children and similar activities marking him out as wholly uncivilized. And, finally, Cozzens covers the ultimate decline of the non-treaty Sioux, with the spread of the Ghost Dance, how it unsettled the whites, and how a combination of last ditch Indian efforts to retain their freedom and white desire to permanently end the Indian “menace” resulted in 1890 in the murder of Sitting Bull and the massacre of the remaining, decrepit non-treaty Sioux at Wounded Knee, regarded as the end of the Indian Wars.

Throughout this time, of course, white settlement had been rapidly expanding. This is the backdrop to all the details of fighting—inexorably, in the background, massive settlement had been underway. Even when they did not directly intrude on Indian territory, their presence effectively hemmed in the Indians and made clear to many of them the inevitable dark future that faced them. And within a few years, free Indians were merely a memory, difficult to comprehend in a landscape of ranches and farms.

Cozzens covers a variety of controversial topics; he makes no effort to be politically correct. (He does not even discuss using the term dubious and inaccurate “Native American,” which appears nowhere in this book.) He discusses scalping to obtain trophies, noting that to the Indians, Indian scalps were more prestigious than white scalps. Mutilation of the dead was near universal among the Plains Indians, not so much (as their opponents saw it) as a demonstration of rage or savagery, but because of the belief it would cripple the dead in the afterlife and thus prevent them from taking revenge on their killers there. Rape, including gang rape, of captured women, white or Indian, by Indians was universal (and conversely, nearly unheard of among the Army). This contradicts Holger Hooch’s claim in “Scars of Independence” that rape of enemy women was rare by Indians, although his claim relates to earlier wars involving the woodland Indians of the East, so this may simply be a cultural difference among tribes. Other interesting, though not controversial, facts also crop up. For example, many Indians took great risks, and hampered their fighting, in order to protect the tribe’s sacred religious objects, and the elaborate dress in which many Plains Indians wore in battle (but by no means all—Crazy Horse, for example, was noted for the simplicity of his dress in battle) was not a method of preening, but so they would look their best when going to meet the Great Spirit. All these facts make the presentation of what is essentially a military history considerably more interesting that it would otherwise be.

It is impossible for us, at this remove, to not admire the Indians who fought in the West, doomed avatars of a doomed way of life. Like Roland, the story of the underdog who goes out in a blaze of glory attracts us. And while the reality is, as always, messier (Roland fought the Basques, not the Muslims, and Geronimo ended up signing autographs on a reservation), there are still salutary lessons, for us and for our children, in the stand taken by the American Indians profiled here—a small group of men who refused to bend the knee, and fought, and died, for the way they and their fathers had lived. As an Englishman of a more confident age said, of another warrior people, “And how can man die better than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his Gods?”

Dirk says

Four stars means "I really liked it," which is hard to reconcile with a narrative that reads like an opening of many raw, festering wounds. The eye and the mind strain to examine too directly and too long this repetitive chronicle of avarice and deception, bloodshed and misery. While the events of the various conflicts and lives of the relevant participants are thoroughly and astutely detailed, the author does not expressly identify the central disturbing irony of so-titled Indian Wars, which is that those wars occurred immediately following a conflict intended to re-unify a nation "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" and resulted in depriving the original Americans of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as they knew it, as well as denying them the freedoms of speech in their native tongues and practicing their respective religions. The aggressors did not see the Indians as equals, nor, by labeling them as savages, were they considered men. The book ends with the events of the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890, but the story continues even now, with the protests in North Dakota.

David Eppenstein says

In the past few years I have read several books dealing with individual Native Americans or with some of the theaters of operation in the conflicts with native Americans. Most of these books were excellent but this book offers the most comprehensive recitation of the events occurring during the decades long struggles between the Indians and the encroachment of white settlers and the Army. Other books I've read offered more details regarding the specific events occurring in specific limited areas of these conflicts and more detail regarding the participants but this book covered every aspect of all the various areas and tribes involved in conflicts with the whites. Considering the scope of this book the accomplishment is remarkable as it is by no means cursory or abbreviated in its treatment of any area of review. For anyone looking for a book providing an overview of the entire history of our Indian wars I can think of no better choice than this volume. However, it should be noted that this book is like all the others covering this chapter of our history; it is sad, disturbing, tragic, brutal, and disappointing. There were no heroes and no innocents in this history. Both sides were deserving of blame or at least shared responsibility for the way events transpired. Reading the history of this era I have tried to imagine a better, less tragic, way things could have been handled. As yet I have not been able to think of one when you consider the time, the circumstances, and the nature of people white and red. The Indian wars are probably one of the most shameful periods of our history.
