

**Volume 2**

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**The Demise of George Armstrong  
Custer - Part I**

**Lead: The death of George Armstrong Custer and his men was rooted in a fundamental disagreement about the way people should live.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Beginning in the early 1800s the youthful United States began to formulate a policy toward its Indian population. Few stopped to consider the opinions of Native Americans who had lived on the North**

**American continent for centuries. The solution was to push these aboriginal tribes west, across the Mississippi to mix with their western cousins, leaving white civilization in peace.**

**This program of removal gained momentum under the Presidency of Andrew Jackson, whose reputation as an Indian fighter brought him great political success and whose attitude toward his adversary reflected the frontier conviction that no redskin had any rights a white man was under obligation to respect. Yet no matter how cooperative the Indians were in this re-arrangement of their lives and how many treaties were signed**

**white civilization always seemed in floodtide.**

**In the Fall of 1851 a council of plains Indians met with government agents near Fort Laramie, Wyoming. At the heart of this three week long meeting was the desire to insure the safety of emigrant wagon trains crossing the traditional home of the Indians on their way West. If the Indians would just settle down and stop wandering around, and act like civilized white men, then the pioneers would be safe and the progress of civilization would proceed unchecked. In response the government would turn loose a veritable cornucopia of goodies: blankets, food, a few rifles and a**

**little fire water to keep the warriors warm at night. All this seemed logical to the government agents.**

**The difficulty with this scenario was that native Americans did not like it. In the words of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces speaking somewhat later, “who authorized white men to keep Indians in one place while the whites might travel as they pleased?” This attitude tended to irritate government bureaucrats and land-hungry settlers. It was a situation ripe for explosion. The demise of George Armstrong Custer was the climax of that explosion. Next time: Custer's executioner: Sitting Bull.**

**At the University of Richmond, this  
is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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