**Intro (Katie Nieland)**

Welcome to Great Plains Anywhere, a Paul A. Olson lecture from the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska. Each year the Center for Great Plains Studies presents a prize for the previous year’s best book on the Great Plains. The winner of the 2020 Stubbendieck Great Plains Distinguished Book Prize is author Pekka Hämäläinen for “Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power” from the Yale University Press. “Lakota America” is an account of the Lakota from the early 16th to the early 21st centuries, including the history of iconic figures of Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, and Sitting Bull.

Hämäläinen is Rhodes Professor of American History at St. Catherine's College at the University of Oxford. He specializes in indigenous, colonial, imperial, environmental, and borderlands history in North America. Before Oxford, he taught at Texas A&M University and the University of California, Santa Barbara. His 2008 book, “The Comanche Empire,” received 12 book awards, including the 2008 Great Plains Distinguished Book Prize and the Bancroft Prize.

**Land Acknowledgement (Dr. Margaret Huettl)**

On behalf of the Center for Great Plains Studies, I would like to begin by acknowledging that the University of Nebraska is a land grant institution with campuses and programs on the past, present, and future homelands of the Pawnee, Ponca, Otoe-Missouria, Omaha, Lakota, Dakota, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, and Kaw peoples, as well as the relocated Ho-Chunk, Iowa, and Sac and Fox peoples. Please take a moment to consider the legacies of more than 150 years of displacement, violence, settlement, and survival that bring us here today. This acknowledgement and the centering of indigenous peoples is a start as we move forward together for the next 150 years.

**Nieland:**

My name is Katie Nieland and I’m the assistant director for the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska.

**Dijon DeLaPorte:**

My name is Dijon DeLaPorte and I’m the events coordinator here at the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Pekka Hämäläinen:**

Hello, all of you over there. This is a wonderful event for me, I’m deeply honored by this recognition, and you have honored me twice now, so it is quite overwhelming and my deepest gratitude to everybody involved. I also want to give a shout out to some of my friends at the University of Nebraska. David Wishart, my good friend, and John Wunder, my dear friend. I’m sure they will probably see this recording.

Before I start the actual presentation, I wanted to draw attention to Lakota winter counts. You see here a slide that explains what the Lakota winter counts are. It’s an incredible indigenous archive. When I realized how robust that archive was, I decided to write this book. The winter counts were absolutely essential to the book and I probably wouldn’t have written this book without them. They allow us to see native history from a distinctly indigenous point of view. During the presentation there will be many more winter counts.

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In 1776, two nations were born in North America. One was conceived in Philadelphia and the other in the Black Hills, and they were separated by 1,700 miles. Exactly a century later, those two nations clashed violently in the heart of the continent along the Little Bighorn River. It was a collision between two radically different expanding powers that had conquered their way to the West and it's outcome was spectacular. Lakotas and their Cheyenne allies killed more than 200 soldiers of the 7th U.S. Cavalry. Remembered as Custer's last stand, the fight remains one of the most famous, intensely studied and passionately debated battles in history. Its ironies and symbolic resonances are seemingly boundless -- the worst defeat the United States suffered in the late 19th Century Indian wars on the cusp of the centennial. A ferocious flamboyant Indian fighter meeting his fate at the hand of Indians who disposed of him routinely. A single death that has refused to die as a metaphor signifying for different ages heroism, ignorance, arrogance, and savagery first that of the Indians and later that of Custer's own.

The battle of the Little Bighorn was a moment in American history that accelerated and turned violently. A perfect victory demanded a perfect retribution, sending the Indians into a spiraling decline and cementing the United States’ Continental hegemony. Within a year Custer's last stand had spawned a reckoning that broke the power of the Lakotas in the northern Plains.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn fixed the Lakota, embodied by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, in historical memory and made them an object of lasting fascination because its meanings resonated so broadly, from America’s imperial hubris to present-day struggles between nation-states and non-state actors and to the unpredictability of history itself. The Little Big Horn has both elevated and diminished the Lakotas in the American mind. Like the Battle of Gettysburg, it's a cultural touchstone around which American identity and self-understanding evolved, and yet, quite stunningly, the Lakota story lacks a comprehensive study. There are hundreds of superb works on Lakota history, but most of them take the Little Bighorn as a guiding coordinate tracing the immediate events essentially the military buildup leading up to it.

Through a quick rear-view look, Lakotas enter the scene fully formed as fierce horse mounted warriors whose palpable confidence gave Lewis and Clark a premonition of the carnage of the Little Bighorn three generations later. The Lakota, in our imagination, are props that bookend America's westward expansion present at its promise-filled conception and its morally ambivalent finale. Now I have tried to detach the Lakota story from the main historical coordinates, which have reduced them to a foil of the American military. I've tried to portray the Lakotas as essential and enduring protagonists who contended with a range of colonial powers from the 17th Century onward, barriers diverting, frustrating, and boosting their ambitions, they emerge as superbly flexible people who reinvented themselves time and again, each a precarious attempt to carve out a safe place in a world where European powers had become a permanent presence.

And perhaps most strikingly, they emerge as supreme warriors who routinely skewed violence, relying on diplomacy persuasion and sheer charm to secure what they needed only to revert to naked force if necessary. When the overconfident Custer came into the Little Bighorn valley on that June day, the Lakotas had already faced a thousand imperial challenges -- they knew exactly what to do with them.

Two centuries earlier the Lakotas had been obscure Buffalo hunters at the edge of a bustling new world of Native Americans and European colonists that emerged in the Eastern woodlands. They had no guns and no metal weapons and they carried little political clout -- all of which spelled danger. The odds of survival were slim for people who lacked access to Europeans and their new technologies of killing. That crisis set off what maybe was the most improbable expansion in American history. Lakotas left their ancestral homelands in the East and reinvented themselves as horse people in the vast continental grasslands. That was the genesis of what I call Lakota America, an expansion and constantly transforming indigenous regime that commanded human fates in the North American interior for generations. Just as there were Spanish, French, and British America, there was Lakota America -- the sovereign domain of the Lakota people. A domain that would protect and, if necessary, expand.

Now I do not want to essentialize the Lakotas, nor do I want to make them consistent. Lakota America takes its cue from iktomi, a shape-shifting spider trickster who embodies what is maybe the defining adjective of the Lakota people: a stunning ability to adapt and change and to assume a new mindset. When the Lakotas came in close contact with the U.S. government in the 1850s, they were in the midst of what was perhaps the most remarkable and least known of their self-reinventions. By 1876 that transfiguration was complete and reached its symbolic culmination in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Custer failed to see that change and led his men into certain death. He was not brought down by a mere alliance of Indians. He was brought down by the Lakota empire.

In the mid 17th Century, New France, centered around the St. Lawrence Valley, was the most promising of North American colonial enterprises. The French were welcome in native villages that dotted the Great Plains region because they treated the Indians as human beings because they married native women and because they were generous and traded guns, powder, and iron. The trade had spawned a middleground where the French and various native nations coexisted and forged an alliance, becoming more powerful in the process. This was a catastrophe for the Oceti Sakowin, the Sioux alliance of seven council fires, who understood themselves as relatives and were bound to one another and the universe by a life-giving essence Wakan. Moving east to west you can see here the seven council fires: four Dakota ones, two Nakota ones, and one Lakota fire. Having moved northwestward from their ancestral lands in the central Mississippi valley, the two people had settled on a transition zone where the eastern woodlands and the western grasslands overlap creating unusually lavish plant and animal life. The Lakota, as the westernmost council fire, had pushed furthest toward the Minnesota valley, but the French Indian alliance had turned the Sioux domain into a terrifying place. The alliance underrolled a dramatic expansion of the fur trade, which thrusted a revolution into the west, turning the Oceti Sakowin eastern border into a war zone. It was a kind of war the Sioux had never seen. Trapped on the wrong side of a technological frontier, they mixed lead and iron with stone and flesh. They tried desperately to gain access to French gun markets, but their native rivals would not allow it, denouncing them and isolating them and killing them.

Looking east and north from their homelands around the Spirit Lake, the Sioux faced 10 hostile Nations. The underlying problem was that the Souix had no relationship with the governor of New France, who was a father to his native allies and whose generosity and affection made enemies of the Sioux so powerful. A young Dakota chief told the governor in Montreal in 1695: “All the nations have a father who gives them his protection and has iron, but I am a bastard searching for a father.” One solution to the crisis came from the American Southwest in the shape of another technological frontier. In 1680 the Pueblo Indians had repelled their Spanish masters in Mexico, banishing them from the Rio Grande valley. The Pueblo farmers had little use for the horses the Spaniards had left behind, and they sold them to the bordering nomads who traded the animals across the interior.

The horse frontier reached the Lakotas in the early 1700s on the western edge of the Sioux country. It was a transcending event. See how this winter count is almost saturated with horses. The Lakotas were in awe of the creature and its tremendous power and its keenness to obey subtle commands -- they called it a sacred dog. And they wanted more of them, which meant turning to the west. Besides sacred dogs, the West abounded with other magnificent things, most notably the bison herds, which seem to grow bigger and bigger to the West. The lands west of the Minnesota valley drew the Lakotas in, triggering the first of many reinventions. They became horse people. The change was so momentous that the Lakota seemed to think that history itself had begun anew. Many Lakota winter counts begin in the early 18th Century with horses. Pushed by French neglect and pulled by Western promises, the Lakotas launched a concerted expansion -- America's first sweeping westward expansion. It was an expansion that in many ways shouldn't have been possible. The odds were horribly stacked against the smallest nation that was about to plunge into the unknown. Drawn by horses and bison in the West, the Lakotas were pulling away from the continental trade corridors, entering into a strange new world in the Western Plains that was not free for the taking. Going at it alone, Lakotas clashed with several prairie peoples: Omaha, Otoes, Iowas, Poncas and others who saw them as invaders. Their rivalries became perilous, lasting for generations; they are North America's longest wars. Lakotas soon found themselves in debilitating political and commercial limbo, surrounded by enemies and cut off by the colonial trade circuits.

But the Lakotas had two distinctive advantages in the escalating wars in the great western grasslands. One was their capacity for reinvention and shapeshifting, and the other was geography. Ahead of them, stacked ahead of them like the rungs of a ladder, lay eight major rivers that cut through the vast prairies from the north to the south, providing a feasible frame for expansion. The Lakotas carved out a western domain one valley at a time, each a crucial addition to their resource space. The gamble paid off handsomely when the Lakotas reached what they called the muddy water, the mighty Missouri, the largest and most luscious of the prairie valleys in the mid-18th Century. The Sioux world had bulged more than 300 miles into the west. Dozens of native villages, squeezed there by Lakota pressure, dotted the valley's long middle section like unevenly strung pearls. It was the greatest concentration of humans and material wealth in the heart of the continent. As many as 50,000 people may have lived in grand riverside villages that abounded with corn, squash, horses, and human energy. The Missouri exerted irresistible pull on the Lakotas who desperately needed horses and carbohydrates for the rapidly growing population. But the Missouri villages of the Mandan and Hidatsas were troubled by this new congress, who had big needs but little to offer. For them the Missouri was home and a sacred place where all their history had happened. And they were determined to keep the Lakotas out. Repelled, Lakotas relied on force, but they absorbed more damage than they inflicted. The villages fought with the state of art guns procured from British traders in Canada killing Lakotas from the safety of their villages. The west was turning into a dead end for Lakotas.

The mid-1700s emerged as a dark period in their winter counts. We see mounted, gun-wielding enemies storming their camps, killing men, warriors defecating next to their lodges, bows in their hands, too afraid to venture out. It was a low point. The great Missouri was crazy, declares an Ogallala winter count. But Lakotas had one great advantage in the struggle over the Missouri. They were members of the great Sioux alliance around which continental and commercial diplomatic circles had begun to converge. Alarmed by the virulence of the war in the Great Lakes, British officials adopted the old French system of gifts, diplomacy, and trade. Guns started to flow into the west in unprecedented quantities into the Lakota villages along the Mississippi. Dakotas also welcomed traders and guns from the southwest, and St. Louis had emerged as a focal point of the interior trade. What belonged to Dakotas belonged to Lakotas. Goods did not flow automatically from east to west, but familial ideals of sharing obliged the Sioux people to take care of each other.

North America's two great technological frontiers had converged on the Lakotas, making them the first nation to fight on horseback with substantial firepower. In the early 1770s, Ogallalas attacked Mandan villages some 200 miles north of the Arikara Ogallala camping grounds. They burned the Mandans out, seen in the Ogallala winter count. The sacking of that Mandan village was a turning point that marked the beginning of a long Lakota ascendancy along the Missouri.

Lakota's raided almost all the Missouri villages, which began falling with shocking rapidity. Already depleted, the villages suffered massive losses in 1781 when a smallpox epidemic raged up and down the Missouri Valley, as you can see by the red dots. The epidemic shocked Lakotas, but it nearly destroyed the villagers whose confined villages became death traps. Arikaras may have lost more than 75% of their people, and they abandoned all but seven of their 32 villages. The carnage left the villagers reeling, and they fled far to the north. A 200-mile expanse of the Missouri now lay vacant in front of the Lakotas. They pushed in. It was the single most important expansion in the history of the Oceti Sakowin win, the moment when the long struggle to secure horses, guns, and military power translated into an unqualified and reassuring success.

Soon several Lakota villages stretched out along the Missouri and its western areas. Lakotas had shifted shape for the second time, making the Missouri valley the center of their world and reinventing themselves as river people. Lakotas had carved a vast river domain in a long and often brutal war, but they were not some blind conquering machine bent on subjugation. They were capable of shifting from violence and war to diplomacy and peace fluidly and swiftly. They now set out to harness the Missouri’s two great resources: the expanding upriver trade from St. Louis and the weakened but still wealthy native villages. These commercial impulses clashed with the geopolitical ambitions of Spanish officials who agonized over imperial challenges from the north. British traders had entrenched themselves on the Mandans, deflecting the upper Missouri fur trade towards Canada from its southbound road. Desperate to secure the lucrative trade, Spanish officials began granting trade licenses to the far reaches of the Missouri. There they calculated the British would be contained, and there they imagined would be a water route to the Pacific coast -- the key to an everlasting Spanish empire in the heart of North America. It was not to be. The Franco-Spanish traders were about to crash into a Lakota barrier they did not know existed.

In 1793 an enterprising trader, Jacques d'Eglise, embarked upriver aiming for Mandan country. He didn't get far. He was stopped 300 miles shy from his destination by Lakotas who promptly confiscated most of his goods. d’Eglise was policy. St. Louis traders were determined to push far upriver to maximize their client base and drive out their British rivals. Lakotas however were determined to prevent the traders from moving past them. They wanted to cut off their native rivals and reserve the bulk of the critical goods, guns, powder, and lead for themselves. It was a scene that was repeated over and over again along the Missouri where the Lakotas now ruled supreme, policing the river they now considered theirs.

By 1800, Lakota dominance in the upper Missouri was an accepted fact. The Mandan villages still loomed large in Spanish plans but what preoccupied the Spanish merchants most was how to move upriver without alienating Lakotas. They resigned to pay tolls for access. Lakotas had turned one of North America's great commercial arteries into a tribute-yielding machine. They could reap massive profits by simply allowing people and goods to pass by. Moreover while exploiting the colonial river traffic, Lakotas also reduced the Missouri villagers to vassals. They blended raiding and extortion with diplomacy and trade into a flexible economy of violence that rendered the villagers weak, needy, and compliant. A French observer thought the Lakotas had reduced the villagers as to a certain kind of serf who cultivates for them and who, they say, takes for them the place of women. To further boost their bargaining power, Lakotas used naked force to create artificial demand for their exports. More mobile than the Arikaras, they isolated them from the bison and forced them to buy meat from them. As a result, large amounts of precious corn poured into Lakota villages allowing them to enjoy one of the best diets on the continent. Three thousand Arikaras had become Lakotas wards -- their economies and their very lives molded to accommodate the new masters of the Missouri.

In the spring of 1803 the United States bought Louisiana from France. And in the fall of 1804 the Lewis and Clark expedition crashed all but blindly into the expanding Lakota America. It was not because of lack of preparation. It was rather a failure to see, learn, and adapt. Had the Americans approached Lakota as traders and generous allies, things may have turned out differently. Instead, however, they came to Lakotas conquerors determined to reduce them to wards of a man they had never heard of. They came with vessels full of goods but refused to share their wealth with the masters of the Missouri. Lakotas not only sent these arrogant nothings on their way, they shadowed them upriver asserting themselves in their rage and undoing their efforts with the Arikaras on their orbit. They followed the Corps of Discovery all the way to their winter camp among the Mandans. Lewis and Clark had traversed the Missouri Valley one imperial expansion too late, and they found it hard to accept. Clark's hurt seeps through in his compiled observations on the Missouri indians. He denounced the Lakotas as the vilest miscreants of the savage race and must ever remain the pirates of the Missouri. Rather than opportunistic pirates, however, the Lakotas were the protectors of the newly established indigenous hegemony. Lewis and Clark had been cut to size by what I call the Lakota meridian, a long integrated corridor of power in the heart of the continent. Lewis and Clark had muddled through the Lakota meridian.

Lakota's treatment of Lewis and Clark set a pattern. For several decades afterwards, Lakotas kept policing the Missouri, sometimes plundering American boats that refused to share their goods, sometimes joining U.S. soldiers and punishing their errant subordinates. Placating the pirates of the Missouri became the new normal, a necessary evil that had to be factored in as a built-in cost so that America's interior trade could reach its full potential. By the 1830s, Americans were firmly in the Lakota orbit. They built numerous trading posts for them. This is the biggest fort on the Missouri (image). They sold guns to them delivered by steamboats, they vaccinated them against smallpox while ignoring their rivals, they openly admired their military prowess, and they even praised their looks and clothing.

The Lakotas long Missouri epic was the most formative period in their history. It was there that they assumed their sacred form as the seven Oyates, or people, splitting up along the Missouri. Articulating a distinctive intermesh of the sublime and the practical in the Lakota way of being, Slow Buffalo, a prominent chief, announced: “We are seven bands and from now on we will scatter over the world; the mysterious one Wakan Tanka has given us this place and now it is up to us to expand ourselves -- we will name every person and everything.” A blend of humility and confidence, Slow Buffalo’s message captures that the Lakotas were about to embark on a new phase in their history.

In the 1830s and 40s Lakotas made their second concerted push into the west, this time from the Missouri Valley, their home for more than half a century. It was a phase that centered to a remarkable degree on a single point, Paha Sapa, the Black Hills, the heart of everything that is. Lakota's had frequented Paha Sapa from the Missouri homelands since the late 18th Century, drawn by its spiritual primacy, it's moist high altitude microclimate, and its massive herds of bison and wild horses. Now Lakotas responded to Saha Sapa’s irresistible pull. Once again basic geography seemed to draw them in. From the Missouri's west bank 8 great tributaries pointed westward like fingers toward the mountains range. But there was a catch. The Western Plains were already occupied. People and their animals could not survive in the Plains without secure access to river valleys. All farming, all trapping, and much of the hunting and gathering took place on the banks. And nearly all those riparian zones were already taken. This meant, once again, war, now against other horse nations.

Entrenched in the Black Hills, Lakotas were surrounded by numerous enemies that matched them in equestrian warfare. They met the challenge their customary way: they shifted shape. Building on the Missouri Valley power politics, they transformed into an imperial power that could coordinate decision making on a national level and implement large-scale mobilizations. They created more centralized political institutions, moving power from local bands to tribal councils and to a select group of praiseworthy men who executed counsel decisions. On a national level the Sundance became an annual event reaffirming Lakota sense of themselves as a single kindred. Such unifying reforms made possible an ambitious coordinated and yet flexible Lakota foreign policy. This is what Lakota dominance looked like on the ground. Lakotas raided nomadic rivals far to the north, west, and south, stealing horses and humans and keeping others out of their hunting range. Closer by, their mobile war parties kept Pawnee, Otoe, Ponca, and Omaha farmers under siege, raiding them for horses, corn, and captives. And in their own villages, Lakota women processed tens of thousands of buffalo robes a year for American markets, securing munitions, clothing, and luxuries for their community.

All seven Lakota lived by this ethos, keeping people and power movable and channeling both wherever they were needed. This made them appear far more formidable than they actually were, allowing them to dominate an oversized portion of the continent. Lakota ascendancy rested not in territorial control, but on a horsepower capacity to connect and exploit key strategic nodes: river valleys, prime hunting grounds, corn yielding native villages, and American trading posts. Lakotas controlled resources without controlling people -- ranging widely, ruling lightly. They moved constantly through space seeking trade, tributes, plunders, pastures, and game. This was a malleable, forever transmuting regime, a kinetic empire built on mobile power politics rather than institutionalized control. It could be understood as an action-based regime which rested on sustained repetition of specific foreign political acts: short and long-range raids, tribute extraction, and diplomatic missions which gave it a fickle on and off again nature. They could be all over the map one moment and nowhere to be seen the next. The Americans never saw them.

By the mid 19th Century Americans and Lakotas, two expanding people, had coexisted peacefully in the west for decades -- not even gold could split them apart. When California suddenly became the richest place on earth in 1848, the U.S. government invited the Lakota and other Plains nations to talk at Fort Laramie to secure access to California gold. Lakotas arrived well prepared. Fully aware of their position as masters of the western Plains, they negotiated hard in exchange for the rights of way along the Platte Valley. U.S. agents offered them a reservation north of the Platte but the Lakotas claimed the Central Plains all the way south to the Arkansas Valley, much of it still Pawnee domain, dated so by the right of Congress. “These lands once belonged to the Kiowa and the Crows,” Ogallala Chief Blackhawk explained, “but we removed those Nations and this we did what the white men do when they want the lands of Indians.” Desperate to appease the most powerful nation in North America, U.S. agents yielded.

The 1851 Horse Creek treaty recognized Lakota land of nearly a hundred thousand square miles north of the North Platte River but Lakota chiefs insisted that their domain would be defined by the needs of the hunt and by action on the ground, not some lines on a map. They made it clear that, whenever necessary, the expansion would continue. Terrified of losing access to the distant gold, U.S. officials went along. Lakotas had affirmed their hegemony in the Great Plains and their right to expand their domain if necessary. Now it could have been a feasible framework for continuing coexistence had not Lieutenant Grattan plunged the United States into a war with the Lakotas over a cow.

When Lakotas killed Grattan and his 29 men not far from Fort Laramie, the U.S. government felt compelled to teach them a lesson. In came the superbly experienced General William Harney who delivered what many policymakers wanted: a massacre and a lesson. At least 86 Lakota died. After that, Lakotas kept the Americans at arm's length. Leaders kept collecting treaty annuities at government agencies, concealing the fact that the vast majority of Lakotas were non-militants. Lakotas continued their expansion, hiding their empire in plain sight. Bison herds, the foundation of their power and sovereignty, were now a main concern. The herds had started to fail under the swelling overland traffic and droughts. Tightening their old alliance with the Cheyenne and Arapahoe, Lakota set out to control the remaining bison hunting grounds that centered in the Powder River country in the western high plains.

The result was a decades-long war with the Crow, Shoshone, Flatheads, Blackfeet, Assiniboine, Pawnee, and others. This buffalo imperialism may have stemmed from a sense of vulnerability, but it transformed the Lakota into a territorial giant. The vast dominion of their empire was the archipelago of rivers, highlands, and plains, and they needed every part of it intact for each offered a specific source of food refuge and sacred power. Residing in faraway agencies, U.S. officials did not understand this nor did they know how thoroughly Lakotas now dominated the great interior. The coexistence with the Lakotas had been a necessary compromise for the U.S. government, which did not seem to have the stomach for war with the superbly mobile people who were all over the map. But the American Civil War changed everything. The 1862 Lakota uprising in Minnesota triggered a sprawling war with the Union Army whose generals now labeled all Sioux Nations as enemies. For Lakotas it became the first fight with the white man when general Alfred Sully attacked them deep in the northern Plains at the Killdeer Mountain. When the Civil War ended, the U.S. government quickly determined that there had to be two reconstructions: one to reform the Confederate South, and the other to pacify the Indigenous West. From the U.S. perspective, the time of sovereign nations was over and, more pointedly, the time of Lakota rule in the west was over. The United States had emerged from the Civil War as an empire and its officials now meant to govern, not negotiate, with indians.

This was the context for the Powder River War and so-called Fetterman massacre, the United States’ first defeat in the long Indian Wars. Lakotas had repeatedly warned the Americans that they wouldn't allow any military force on their lands. And when the army ignored the mandate and started building force in the Powder River country, the Lakota empire snapped into action, galvanized by Red Cloud who would announce that killing Americans had become as valuable as killing native enemies. Lakotas eliminated the invading army swiftly and clinically. Red Cloud held off signing a peace treaty until the army dismantled its last fort in the Powder River country. The United States had lost a war and the 1868 treaty of Fort Laramie reflected that. In addition to the great Sioux reservation itself, Article 11 recognized Lakota hunting rights all the way south to the Republican Valley. And Article 16 gave them a massive unseated territory without specifying a northern limit, effectively leading the door open for Lakota expansion all the way into Canada which they promptly did. This newest version of the Lakota America was a colossal creation covering nearly 400,000 square miles. The empire received traders, both Canadian and Americans, from all directions and it commanded a vast rating domain that yielded masses of horses and captives, and also blocked railway construction and, by extension, the United States westward expansion in its tracks.

Contemporary Americans did not have maps like this (image). Mapping indigenous power systems was simply beyond their comprehension because they still saw Indians as primitive peoples incapable of large-scale geopolitical maneuvering. The United States army misread the situation with devastating consequences. In 1874 Custer led the Black Hills expedition aiming to build a new military fort to protect railway construction. But the expedition found traces of gold, triggering a rush and Paha Sapa was soon teeming with prospectors. One empire had invaded the vital center of the other, forcing a grotesque imbalance. The Lakotas and Americans had coexisted in the northern Plains for decades, but from now on they found it overwhelmingly difficult. Thousands of Lakota already lived at agencies, pushed there by shrinking bison herds and drawn by government annuities. This (image) is the Red Cloud agency in northwest Nebraska. And the U.S. agents believed that they had managed to separate the hostiles from the friendlies, breaking the solidarity of the Lakota people. They had not.

Lakota leaders sent runners to call on warriors from all agencies, and the hostile-friendly dichotomy melted away as the outwardly divided Lakota Nations snapped into collective action. Behind it emerged once more the Lakota empire. Lakotas had shifted shape, executing a massive national mobilization, but the Americans had missed it. Custer and his Seventh were already doomed. At a Sundance in the Rosebud Creek, Sitting Bull predicted a galvanizing victory. The Lakotas and their Cheyenne and Arapahoe allies moved up the Little Bighorn. As battles go, the Little Bighorn was face-to-face, fluid, fragmented, uncontrollable, and largely improvised because the Lakotas and their allies were simply better at it and they knew it, too. Custer and his men reacted to the native maneuvers rather than executing their own. It was Crazy Horse, not Custer, who executed a single tactical maneuver, riding nearly a mile downstream with a band of soldiers out flanking their enemy and reducing them to sitting ducks. What happened was not this what happened was not this (image of Custer shooting) it was more like this (art of a chaotic battlefield). Thank you very much.

**Q: Can you share a little bit about what you learned by researching the Lakota people that surprised you?**

**A:** I think the most surprising thing was how essential the Lakotas and the Oceti Sakowin and Sioux alliance were so early in the 1600 and 1700s. They were already central protagonists there. At that time, living in the western edge of the Great Lakes, they were absolutely essential political and diplomatic actors in that region. I mean, usually we think that the Lakota and the Sioux just exploded on the scene during the Indian Wars in the late 19th Century, but their dominance goes much much further back. This kind of explains in a way why the Lakotas were able to humiliate the United States Army over and over again. It was because they had generations and generations of experience in how to deal with colonial powers and how to cut them down to size. They had competed with the British, with the French, and with the Spanish, diminishing them, and the United States is just one more to educate and, if necessary, punish and subjugate.

**Q: What do you hope people take away from this book?**

**A:** That's a good question. I think the most important thing is the resilience of the Lakota people and the creativity of the Lakota people. The ability to adapt to new mindsets and to very flexibly and innovatively move from war to diplomacy and back. Foreign policy, and they had a foreign policy, that's the critical piece, is not reserved for colonial powers so Lakotas had very robust and systematic policy which is very supple and nimble, allowing them to deal with colonial powers or government agents again and again. That's one (takeaway): creativity and resiliency and adaptability, basically the Americans could not read the Lakota system and that's why they were always a couple of steps behind all the way to the Little Bighorn.

**Q: Can you share how someone with your background, a Finnish professor that works at the University of Oxford, became fascinated with northern Native American culture enough that it's become a part of your life's work?**

**A:** Yeah it is my life's work, but I have to say it's because I came to Nebraska and there was John Wunder and David Wishart, and they took me under their wing and they introduced me to, it was called at the time, new Indian history. I had never heard of it. So they introduced me to that, and that was a really exciting revolution in the field, and I was caught immediately and absorbed by it, and I'll still be at it until the end of my days.

**Q: How have the Lakota people responded to your book?**

**A:** I would say it's mixed. You know a lot of people have appreciated it and some people are more critical. There's been criticism about the use of the word “empire” in Lakota context. That's something I perhaps should have explained more clearly in the book: what I mean by Lakotas as empire builders. Basically Lakotas built an empire to survive colonialism. That's the big lesson, I think, and they had to do that because the United States’ power and dominance was so overwhelming the Lakotas needed to reinvent themselves as an imperial people just to fight them off and survive. That should have been more clear in the book, but this is how it goes. This is scholarship. You hear the criticism and then you react and modify your interpretations. In the next book I'm writing now, the Lakota will make an appearance, and I will incorporate this.

**Q: If people want to find out more about your work, where should they go?**

**A:** I've written two books now and I've co-authored a textbook of American history. And there's quite a few articles about my work.

**Dr. Pekka, thank you for joining us today. We appreciate you sharing your knowledge on this topic.**

Thank you so much for having me. This was a blast. Thank you.