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Religious Transformations in Indian Territory

The American expansion during the 1870s and later 1900s caused the adoption of new religious practices for many Indian tribes. One group associated as the starting point of religious transformation was the Kiowa Indians. The Kiowas were an indigenous Indian tribe located in Oklahoma who lived in relative peace until the westward expansion of the Americans. When the Americans first began to make moves towards the Great Plains, conflict and tension immediately arose. To de-escalate the rising conflict, the American Quakers intervened in an attempt to establish a peaceful resolution with the Indians. The Quakers had, in the past, made many peace treaties with other tribes and had strong relationships with native American tribes. Upon the Quaker's interaction with the Indians, they began to develop a strong friendship with one another. The Indians were interested in the laws that governed the Quaker religion. The Indians have never seen a group who refused to engage in violence. Eventually, they aligned a peace treaty between the Americans, which went through the Quakers. However, tensions began to rise once again when a radical named Lourie Tatum wanted to revolutionize the Indian religion. He disliked their practices and decided to intervene. He tried to convert them all to Christianity and to stop their current practices. However, the Kiowas didn't want to change as what Lourie wanted

was more than a religious transformation. He wanted them to improve their entire lifestyles, including how they lived. However, what Louri wanted didn't work with their lifestyles. Louri was attempting to make them live in homes and start farming, but the Indians have never lived such a life, therefore, didn't know-how. They have always flourished on moving around and shifting locations depending on food supply.

In retaliation towards his lack of progress, Louri began to punish the Indians through aggressive and militaristic moves. His first move was to start cutting down on the Indian's rations and reduce their supplies. Not many people were aware of the corrupt behavior occurring, nor were they aware it violated the terms of the peace treaty established between the Kiowa and Quakers. When the Indians still refused to change, Louri began to take military action. Louri ordered that groups of Indians be arrested in an attempt to teach them English and forcefully convert them to Christianity. He planned that they would come back to their tribal group and spread Christianity. Louri's plan failed miserably as most who went back converted immediately to the religion they had previously practiced. The Indians, in retaliation to Louri, decided to fight back by attacking an American wagon, which ended up killing seven Americans. At this point, the Americans were outraged and blamed the Quakers for the Indian's violent outbreak. Not many people were aware of the corruption and unfair treatment that built up towards this moment.

What this all comes down to is that the American's aggressive expansion and belligerent behavior required Indians to change and seek guidance. Once the military outlawed one of the Kiowa's most sacred and religiously significant ceremonies, Sundancing, They needed something greater to guide them. Sun dancing was a way for the Indians to gain insight and

power, especially within the difficult times between the Americans. They used it for means of spiritual growth and protection. In response to the Americans banning, the Kiowas began adopting a new practice of eating a cactus called Peyote. Peyote, when eaten in a religious context, allowed the user to experience guidance from a supreme source, as well as healing, and spiritual power. Each of these things was needed more than ever. Some may wonder why such a practice would occur now? It's merely because of the stress the Americans military responses and behavior had on the Indians. They required spiritual power and guidance to help them through these challenging times. And to meet those needs, they resulted in the consumption of Peyote. Over time, the practice of consuming Peyote was adopted by over 50 Indian tribes and still remains a well-practiced tradition in Indian culture. During times of hardships, most use the ritual to survive and stay stable during the difficulty. They gain strength, knowing the Kiowa survived and handled Americans' hardships in there life by remaining strong to their spiritual practices.