

Conflict with the Indigenous Nations III - Key Events

The Permanent Indian Frontier, 1830
CAUSES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In 1803 the US government bought Louisiana (ie the Great Plains) from the French.• President Andrew Jackson (1829-37) did not agree with written as though for an 8-year-old. self-governing status of the five 'civilised tribes' in the southern states.• In 1829 gold was discovered near New Echota, the Cherokee capital.• In 1830 the Indian Removal Act gave Jackson power to expel the Indigenous tribes.• The Cherokee appealed the Supreme Court; they won, but the government ignored the ruling.• The government assigned the five tribes "secured and guaranteed" land in 'Indian Territory' (Oklahoma).
EVENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The government enforced the Removal Act in the Seminole War (1835-41) and the Creek War (1836).• The Chickasaw, Choctaw and Cherokee signed over their land.• 125,000 Indigenous people were rounded up into groups of c.700 and forced to walk the 1,000 miles on what the Cherokees called 'The Trail of Tears'.
CONSEQUENCES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conditions on the forced march were terrible; perhaps a third of expelled Indigenous Peoples died.• Jackson also expelled Indigenous Peoples from the northern US; in all he added to the US 170,000 sq miles of Indigenous land, which was sold to farmers.• Jackson became incredibly popular with the public, but was criticised in Congress; the Seminole War had cost \$20million and 1,500 soldiers – so much that the government was anxious to avoid future conflict.• The Indigenous Nations believed they were assured of the Plains beyond the 'Permanent Frontier'.
The Fort Laramie (Horse Creek) Treaty, 1851
CAUSES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Settlers (after 1846) and gold prospectors (after 1848) began crossing the Plains; they killed and disrupted the buffalo. The US government wanted to protect the migrants from attack.• There was a drought 1845-56 which disrupted the buffalo; Indigenous warriors started stealing cows from the migrants.• After the Seminole Wars, the US government wanted to avoid a war; Congress allocated \$100,000 for a peace assembly; 12,000 Indigenous people attended.
EVENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Because the Indigenous people needed grazing land for their horses, the actual meeting took place at Horse Creek, 30 miles from Fort Laramie.• The government assigned set hunting grounds to each Nation "for all time", and promised to prevent 'depredations' by US migrants, and to pay a \$50,000 'annuity' each year for 50 years.• The Indigenous tribes agreed to let migrants pass safely, to allow the government to build roads and forts, and to stop fighting between the tribes.• The government wanted each tribe to appoint a single negotiator; they refused – this meant that the Indigenous warriors did not regard the Treaty as personally binding.
CONSEQUENCES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This marked the start of the US government's policy of 'concentration' into large reservations.• The Indigenous Nations believed that they were assured of their hunting grounds on the Plains.• The Treaty kept the peace only until the 'Mormon Cow Incident' (1854) when a hothead Army Lieutenant named John Grattan led a troop of 30 men to arrest a Lakota Sioux who had killed a lame cow belonging to local Mormons. When one of the soldiers shot Chief Conquering Bear, the Sioux killed & mutilated the soldiers, and looted the local trading post. The uprising was put down by a US troop of 600 men but, apart from those killed in the fighting, no one was executed.• One of the Sioux involved in the incident was Red Cloud.

Little Crow's War, 1862

CAUSES

- In 1858, the government had taken back the northern half of the Santee Sioux land agreed in 1851.
- The settler population of Minnesota had grown 29-fold 1850-60, dramatically reducing the bison and elk.
- The Santee Sioux were trying to farm, but their crop was destroyed by cutworm in 1861.
- Land Agents had been skimming the annuity payments, and no payment was received for 1862.
- When credit was refused at the government store; Agent Myrick was heard to say: "Let them eat grass".
- The Army had been reduced because of the Civil War.
- [Trigger] A local storekeeper was killed by a group of young Santee.

EVENTS

- Chief Little Crow attacked the reservation Agency; Myrick's head was found with grass stuffed in its mouth.
- Little Crow was unable to capture Fort Ridgely or the town of Little Ulm, so bands of Santee roamed the country slaughtering the settlers; in all perhaps 700 were killed, and as many as 10,000 were forced to flee.
- It took the Army until September to send reinforcements, but when they did the Santee were defeated at the Battle of Wood Lake
- Little Crow fled, but was killed in 1863.

CONSEQUENCES

- Little Crow's skeleton was put on display in the Minnesota Capitol, 1879-1915.
- 392 Santee were tried before juries of enraged settlers; they were not allowed attorneys; 303 were sentenced to death. This was reduced to 38 after the local Bishop appealed to President Lincoln; it was still the largest mass-execution in US history.
- The government abolished the Santee reservation and exiled the surviving 1,300 Santee to Crow Creek reservation in South Dakota, putting a \$25 bounty for the scalp of any Santee who tried to remain.
- The murder of civilians created a rage, racism and thirst for revenge which tainted all future relations between the white Americans and the Indigenous Peoples: "The only good Indian is a dead Indian".
- One visitor to Crow Creek, who was horrified by what he found there, was Sitting Bull.

Sand Creek Massacre, 1864

CAUSES

- All that had gone before, especially Little Crow's War.
- In 1858 gold was discovered at Pike's Peak, Colorado; thousands of prospectors flooded on land allocated by the Fort Laramie Treaty to the Cheyenne and Arapaho.
- In 1860, the government redefined the reservation as an area around Sand Creek, one-thirteenth the size of the 1851 allocation.
- After 1862 the Army was reduced because of the Civil War, leaving only the local volunteer regiment, the 1st Colorado.
- Some Cheyenne Dog Soldiers refused to go to the new reservation; the 1st Colorado responded by burning Cheyenne camps and murdering the peaceful Chief Lean Bear in cold blood. The Cheyenne responded with raids which killed 96 settlers and stole some 300 head of cattle.
- In 1864, Governor Evans called all peaceful Cheyenne to meet him at Fort Lyon for peace talks; one of those who attended was Black Kettle, who brought a group of 100 women and children, perhaps 25 old men and eight Cheyenne Chiefs – he was told to camp at Sand Creek, and flew a US flag and a white flag over his tipi.

EVENTS

- On 29 November 1864, Methodist pastor and volunteer Colonel John Chivington took command of the 1st Colorado and attacked the camp.
- Chivington said to his soldiers: "Kill 'em all, big and small, nits make lice!"
- The Cheyenne were slaughtered, dismembered, and their body parts paraded around the camp, and then around the local townships. All eight Chiefs were killed.

CONSEQUENCES

- The Chiefs killed were those who had advocated peace. Instead the Dog soldiers now control, and led reprisal raids throughout Colorado and Nebraska.
- Indigenous warriors realised that there would never be a peace they could trust, but that they could never defeat the Army; many resolved simply to fight to the death.
- The massacre was condemned in the east, but nothing else was done except to give the surviving Cheyenne an even smaller reservation in Oklahoma.

Red Cloud's War, 1866-67

CAUSES

- All that had gone before, especially the Sand Creek Massacre.
- Gold was discovered in Montana; thousands of prospectors went there along a new trail – the Bozeman Trail (1864) – across the Sioux Hunting Grounds. When the government refused to stop the prospectors, the Sioux started attacking them.
- The government started building a chain of three Forts along the trail; an army expedition in 1865 failed to defeat the Sioux.
- In 1866 Red Cloud was about to sign a peace treaty, when 1,300 soldiers rode into Sioux territory, so he refused, and went to war instead.
- About 4,000 Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors assembled.

EVENTS

- Red Cloud's genius is that he kept such a large army together for two years.
- Red Cloud's warrior bands closed the Bozeman Trail and besieged the Army forts.
- When a hothead Army Captain named William Fetterman led a troop of 80 men to defend a wood-gathering party, they were ambushed and killed by Indigenous Warriors led by Crazy Horse.
- The Army reinforced the Forts, but was unable to break the siege.
- In 1867, the Cheyenne attacked Fort Smith and the Sioux attacked Fort Kearny – both failed with large casualties; Red Cloud resumed the siege of the Forts and the attacks on the Bozeman Trail.

CONSEQUENCES

- The government wanted the Army to protect the building of the transcontinental railroads, so it agreed the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. This created the Great Sioux reservation (much larger than in 1851) for "as long as the grass should grow and the water flow". No white person was allowed to enter. The Army abandoned the three Forts. For his part Red Cloud agreed not to attack any railroads or settlers outside the reservation.
- Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and many younger Sioux withdrew to continue fighting.
- Red Cloud changed his tactics to campaigning for fair treatment from the US Indian Bureau, and for aid to help the Sioux to adapt to reservation life.

Fetterman's Trap 1866

CAUSES

- The Army was besieged in Fort Kearny; at 10am on 21 December 1866, Colonel Carrington sent out a party of 90 to collect firewood from a nearby wood called the Pinery.
- Red Cloud was outraged by the cutting down of the trees; it was resolved to lure the soldiers into a trap, and a force of a thousand warriors gathered.
- A few attacked the wood party; hearing the gunfire, Carrington sent out a relief force of 81 infantry and cavalry.
- Captain William Fetterman, a hothead who – despite never having fought the Sioux – boasted that he could defeat them with 80 men, asked for command of a relief force.
- Carrington TWICE ordered him – the second time in public – not to go beyond the Lodge Trail Ridge.

EVENTS

- All the way to the Pinery, a small group of Sioux led by Crazy Horse taunted and harried Fetterman.
- Fetterman was an idiot; instead of going to the Pinery, he chased Crazy Horse's men half a mile beyond the Lodge Trail Ridge AND allowed his cavalry to separate and get half a mile further ahead still.
- The Sioux ambushed, killed and mutilated the infantry in twenty minutes, and then did the same for the cavalry twenty minutes later. It was all over by 1pm.

CONSEQUENCES

- Fort Kearny was reinforced, but the siege continued.
- The success tempted the Sioux to try two frontal attacks in 1867, both of which (army with mainly bows and arrows against repeating rifles) they lost with heavy casualties.
- The incident made the government realise that it was impossible to defend the Bozeman Trail without a huge Army presence; instead it made 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty.

Battle of the Little Bighorn, 1876

CAUSES

- All that had gone before, especially the 'Indian Wars' of 1862-67.
- 1871: the Indian Appropriations Act ended recognition of the Indigenous tribes as independent nations. The government stopped negotiating with the tribes and instead declared them 'domestic dependent nations' subject to federal laws.
- 1873: a banking/economic crisis put pressure on the US government to open up the Black Hills area of Dakota to white settlers – land promised to the Sioux by the Treaty of Laramie in 1868.
- Gold: in 1874 Custer led a scouting expedition and found gold in the Black Hills; by 1875 thousands of prospectors headed for the area as a new Gold Rush began.
- Refusal by the Sioux to sell the land: the US government tried to buy the Black Hills for \$6 million. Chief Red Cloud's price was too high. Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull refused to sell: "One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk" The government lost patience.
- Renegades: some Oglala Sioux warriors (who followed Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull) refused to move onto reservations in 1868. They roamed the Bighorn area and attacked any wašiču [the Lakota word for 'white person'] who crossed their hunting ground.
- Ultimatum: the Sioux were given until 31 January 1876 to move onto the reservation. None did and they were declared 'hostile'.
- General Sheridan ("The only good Indians I ever saw were dead") drew up his plans to defeat them.

EVENTS

- 21st June 1876: two US armies, one led by General Gibbon, one by General Terry, met at the Yellowstone River. General Terry's army included the 7th Cavalry led by Lt Colonel George Custer.
- Terry ordered Gibbon to march along the Little Bighorn river and Custer to march round the Wolf mountains to meet in a two-pronged attack on the Indian camp.
- Terry did not know that the Sioux had gathered 3,000 warriors together, including Cheyenne and Arapaho.
- 25th June 1876: Custer divided his regiment and sent Major Reno to attack the village downstream. Captain Benteen was sent scouting. Custer headed north around the settlement with 215 men.
- Custer's retreat was cut off by Chief Crazy Horse; he and all of his troops were killed.
- Benteen saved Reno from being massacred. Gibbon and Terry arrived. The Sioux withdrew.

CONSEQUENCES

- Military victory; the most decisive defeat for the US army during the Indian wars.

BUT

- White Americans heard news of the defeat on the centenary of the Declaration of Independence. They were angry and humiliated and wanted revenge. Thousands of 'Custer's Avengers' enlisted.
- TOTAL WAR: the US govt was determined to destroy the Sioux and began 'total war' (ie war against the whole population, not just the warriors).
 - The US army harried the Sioux in a winter campaign (the first; previously the US army had fought only in summer, giving the Sioux time to rest), starving them into surrender.
 - 1880-83: Buffalo hunters killed 400,000 bison, wiping out the northern herds and destroying the Indigenous way of life.
 - After 1879 many Indigenous children were sent away to attend 'Indian Boarding Schools', where they were re-educated into western ways.
 - In 1883, the government required each reservation to set up a 'Court of Indian Offences' to try and punish traditional dances, polygamy, gift giving, drunkenness, and 'medicine men' & their "heathenish rites and customs".
 - The Dawes Act (1887) gave white Americans the right to buy Indigenous-owned land.
- The Little Bighorn was the start of the Sioux's total defeat.

The Dawes Act, 1887

CAUSES

- All that had gone before, especially the fury after Little Bighorn; the Dawes Act was a key part of the government's policy to destroy the tribes.
- Not all Americans were 'exterminators' – some hoped that Indigenous people could be assimilated/ Americanised into capitalism and individualism; Senator Henry Dawes hoped to "rid the nation of tribalism through the virtues of private property, allotting land parcels to Indian heads of family".

EVENTS

- A head of family would be eligible for a grant of 160 acres, with four years to select and apply for their plot. Individuals who left and lived apart from their tribe could become American citizens.
- An 1891 amendment allowed an owner's children to inherit the land.

CONSEQUENCES

- It was a racist discriminatory law, defining 'Indians' by their 'blood-quantum'.
- 160 acres was insufficient to support a family, and the 1891 inheritance rules further split up the allotments; many ended up worthless or having to be sold.
- The Oklahoma Land Run (April 1889): By the Act, 'surplus' land was split into 160-acre plots. In Oklahoma two million acres were put on offer. Settlers raced to claim a plot and it was all claimed within 24 hours.
- In all 90 million acres (two-thirds) of tribal land were lost by the Indigenous tribes and sold to non-natives.
- The abolition of communal ownership destroyed the Indigenous communal way of life. Also, by turning warriors into farmers and employees, the Act disrupted Indigenous authority and gender roles.

Wounded Knee, 1890

CAUSES

- All that had gone before, especially the government's 'total war', assimilation and severalty of the tribal lands. By 1890 the Indigenous Nations were totally defeated and demoralised.
- Conditions on the reservations were unbearable.
- Settlers continued to invade the reservations

EVENTS

- A medicine man called Wovoka had a vision: He believed and taught that if Indians wore certain ceremonial clothing and danced in a certain way they would be impossible to kill and their way of life would return.
- This Ghost Dance spread through all reservations; white Americas feared they were preparing for war.
- The government tried to arrest Sitting Bull (he was killed in the attempt).
- Sioux Chief Big Foot, trying to avoid the trouble, led his people to Wounded Knee Creek, where they were massacred by the US Army.

CONSEQUENCES

- Wounded Knee has been described as "the worst mass shooting in US history", though this is disputed.
- The public approved, and 19 soldiers were given medals of honour for their actions at Wounded Knee.
- There were a few retaliatory attacks by Indigenous warriors on US armed forces in 1890, but Wounded Knee is generally regarded as the end of the 'Indian Wars'.
- Indigenous tribes lived on the reservations.
- Indigenous people were excluded from US society. Not until 1924 were they all declared citizens, some States barred them from voting until as late as 1957, and only in 1970 did President Nixon recommend 'self-determination' (restoration of self-government and tribal & cultural renewal).