

Native Americans Fight to Survive

MAIN IDEA

The Native Americans of the Great Plains fought to maintain their way of life as settlers poured onto their lands.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The taking of their lands led to social and economic problems for Native Americans that continue to this day.

TERMS & NAMES

reservation

Sand Creek

Massacre

Sitting Bull

George A. Custer

Battle of the Little
Bighorn

Wounded Knee
Massacre

Dawes Act

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Buffalo Bird Woman was a Hidatsa who lived almost 100 years. She was born in 1840. As a child, she and her family made their home along the Missouri River. Later the federal government forced her family onto a reservation. A **reservation** is land set aside for Native American tribes.

The federal government attempted to "Americanize" Native American children, including Buffalo Bird Woman, by sending them away to boarding schools. But Buffalo Bird Woman struggled to hold on to Hidatsa customs. As an old woman, she looked back on her early years.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Sometimes at evening I sit, looking out on the . . . Missouri [River]. . . In the shadows I seem . . . to see our Indian village, with smoke curling upward from the earth lodges; and in the river's roar I hear the yells of the warriors, the laughter of . . . children as of old.

Buffalo Bird Woman, quoted in *Native American Testimony*, edited by Peter Nabokov

As white settlers claimed Native American lands, Plains peoples fought a losing battle to save not only their homes but their way of life.



Buffalo Bird Woman

Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about Native Americans.

Many diverse people settled the West!

Native American Life on the Plains

Before the arrival of Europeans in the 1500s, most Plains tribes lived in villages along rivers and streams. The women tended crops of beans, corn, and squash. The men hunted deer and elk and in the summer stalked the vast buffalo herds that inhabited the Plains.

In the early 1540s, the Spanish brought the first horses to the Great Plains. The arrival of horses changed the way of life of the Plains people. They quickly became expert riders. By the late 1700s, most Plains tribes kept their own herds of horses. Mounted on horseback, hunters traveled far from their villages seeking buffalo.

Vocabul
nomadic:
wandering
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Reading

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Maidu

Tule
Rigger

PACIFIC
COAST

and lost by
Native Americans

Before 1850

1850-1870

1870-1890

Native Ameri
reservations

Never formal
by treaty

The buffalo was central to the life of Plains tribes. Its meat became the chief food in their diet, while its skins served as portable shelters called tipis. Plains women turned buffalo hides into clothing, shoes, and blankets and used buffalo chips (dried manure) as cooking fuel. Bones and horns became tools and bowls. Over time, many Plains tribes developed a nomadic way of life tied to buffalo hunting.

Vocabulary
nomadic:
wandering from
place to place

A Clash of Cultures

When the federal government first forced Native American tribes of the Southeast to move west of the Mississippi in the 1830s, it settled them in Indian Territory. This territory was a huge area that included almost all of the land between the Missouri River and Oregon Territory. Most treaties made by the government with Native Americans promised that this land would remain theirs “as long as Grass grows or water runs.”

Unfortunately, these treaty promises would be broken. Government policy was based on the belief that white settlers were not interested in the Plains. The land was considered too dry for farming. However, as wagon trains bound for Oregon and California crossed the Great Plains in the 1850s, some pioneers saw possibilities for farming and ranching on its grasslands. Soon white settlers moved onto the prairies.

These settlers pressured the federal government for more land. They also wanted protection from Native Americans in the area. In 1851, the government responded by calling the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and

Reading History

A. Analyzing Causes What was the major source of conflict between white settlers and Native Americans?

Native American Lands in the West, 1850–1890

INTERACTIVE



other Plains tribes together near Fort Laramie in present-day Wyoming. Government officials tried to buy back some Native American land and also set boundaries for tribal lands. Many Plains tribes signed the First Treaty of Fort Laramie (1851)—they saw no other choice.

But some Cheyennes and Sioux resisted. They preferred conflict with settlers and soldiers to the restrictions of reservation life. In southeastern Colorado, bands of Cheyenne warriors attacked miners and soldiers. In response, about 1,200 Colorado militia led by Colonel John Chivington opened fire on a peaceful Cheyenne village along Sand Creek in 1864. More than 150 Cheyenne men, women, and children were killed in what came to be known as the **Sand Creek Massacre**.

The Plains tribes reacted to such attacks by raiding white settlements. One of the fiercest battles took place in Montana. There the government had begun to build a road called the Bozeman Trail across Sioux hunting grounds. To stop construction, the Sioux attacked construction workers. In 1866, Captain W. J. Fetterman and 80 troopers stumbled into a deadly ambush set by the Sioux. All the soldiers were killed in what was called the Fetterman Massacre.

Such incidents finally forced the government to try to find a way to end the fighting. In 1868, U.S. officials signed the Second Treaty of Fort Laramie with the Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho. The treaty gave these tribes a large reservation in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

ReadingHistory

B. Reading a Map
Locate the site of the Sand Creek Massacre on the map on page 563.

ReadingHistory

C. Recognizing Effects What were the results of the Battle of the Little Bighorn?

Background
Nez Perce means “pierced nose” in French. French-Canadian trappers gave this name to these Native American people because some of them wore jewelry in their noses.

HISTORY through ART

Artist Edgar S. Paxson researched the Battle of the Little Bighorn for 20 years to try to accurately re-create the last moments of the fighting. Custer is at the center clutching a bullet wound in his chest.

What do you think this painting shows about the fighting at the Little Bighorn?

INTERACTIVE

Battle of the Little Bighorn

The Second Treaty of Fort Laramie did not end the trouble between the Sioux and white settlers, though. In 1874, white prospectors discovered gold in the Black Hills. Paying no attention to the Fort Laramie treaty, thousands of miners rushed onto Sioux land. Tribal leaders angrily rejected a government offer to buy back the land. Many Sioux warriors fled the reservation during the



winter of 1875–1876. They united under the leadership of two Sioux chiefs—**Sitting Bull** and Crazy Horse—to push back the intruders.

The Seventh Cavalry set out to return the Sioux to the reservations. It was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel **George A. Custer**, a hero of the Civil War and of other campaigns against Plains tribes. On June 25, his forces met several thousand Sioux and Cheyennes near the Little Bighorn River in Montana in the **Battle of the Little Bighorn**. In less than two hours, Custer and his men—211 in all—were wiped out.

News of Custer's defeat shocked the nation. The government responded by stepping up military action. As a result, Little Bighorn was the last major Native American victory. In 1877, Crazy Horse surrendered and Sitting Bull and his followers fled to Canada. In 1881, Sitting Bull's starving band surrendered to U.S. troops and were returned to the reservation.

Resistance in the Northwest and Southwest

The Nez Perce (nehz PURS) was a Northwest tribe that lived in eastern Oregon and Idaho. Until the 1860s, the Nez Perce lived peacefully on land guaranteed to them by an 1855 treaty. However, as white settlement increased, the government forced them to sell most of their land and move to a narrow strip of territory in Idaho. Most reluctantly agreed, but a group of Nez Perce led by Chief Joseph refused.

In 1877, Chief Joseph and his followers fled north to seek refuge in Canada. For four months, the Nez Perce traveled across 1,000 miles of rugged terrain with army troops in pursuit. About 40 miles from the Canadian border, the army caught up with them. Greatly outnumbered, the Nez Perce surrendered. Chief Joseph spoke for his people when he said, "I will fight no more, forever."

In the Southwest, both the Navajos and Apaches fought against being removed to reservations. U.S. troops ended Navajo resistance in Arizona in 1863 by burning Navajo homes and crops. Most Navajos surrendered. Nearly 8,000 took what they called the "Long Walk," a brutal journey of 300 miles to a reservation in eastern New Mexico. Hundreds died on the way. Their new home was a parched strip of land near the Pecos River. After four years, the government allowed the Navajos to return to Arizona, where many live today.

Native American Leaders

Sitting Bull ▶
(c. 1831–1890)
Sioux chief: "We did not give our country to you; you stole it."



◀ **Chief Joseph**
(1840–1904)
Nez Perce chief:
"It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and all the broken promises."



Geronimo ▶
(1829–1909)
Apache leader:
"Once I moved about like the wind. Now I surrender."



Reading History

Recognizing Effects What were the results of the Battle of the Little Bighorn?

Background

Nez Perce means "pierced nose" in French. French-Canadian trappers gave this name to these Native American people because some of them wore jewelry in their noses.

**“Once I moved
about like the
wind. Now I
surrender.”**

Geronimo

In the early 1870s, the government forced many Apaches to settle on a barren reservation in eastern Arizona. But a group led by Geronimo refused to remain. Escaping the reservation, these Apaches survived by raiding settlers' homes. Geronimo was captured many times but always managed to escape. In 1886, however, he finally surrendered and was sent to prison.

A Way of Life Ends

As the Native Americans of the Plains battled to remain free, the buffalo herds that they depended upon for survival dwindled. At one time, 30 million buffalo roamed the Plains. However, hired hunters killed the animals to feed crews building railroads. Others shot buffalo as a sport or to supply Eastern factories with leather for robes, shoes, and belts. From 1872 to 1882, hunters killed more than one million buffalo each year.

By the 1880s, most Plains tribes had been forced onto reservations. With their hunting grounds fast disappearing, some turned in despair to a Paiute prophet named Wovoka. He preached a vision of a new age in which whites would be removed and Native Americans would once again freely hunt the buffalo. To prepare for this time, Wovoka urged Native Americans to perform the chants and movements of the Ghost Dance. Wovoka's hopeful vision quickly spread among the Plains peoples.

Many of Wovoka's followers, especially among the Sioux, fled their reservations and gathered at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. White settlers and government officials began to fear that they were preparing for war. The army was sent to track down the Ghost Dancers. They rounded them up, and a temporary camp was made along Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, on December 28, 1890. The next day, as the Sioux were giving up their weapons, someone fired a shot. The troopers responded to the gunfire, killing about 300 men, women, and children. The **Wounded Knee Massacre**, as it was called, ended armed resistance in the West.

These Native American students in Oklahoma Territory in 1901 posed for a class picture at the school where they were sent to learn the culture of white people.



Background
In 1889, fewer than 100 buffalo remained.

ReadingHistory

D. Drawing Conclusions

What was the most important factor in the defeat of the Native Americans?

Read
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The Dawes Act Fails

Some white Americans had been calling for better treatment of Native Americans for years. In 1881, Helen Hunt Jackson published *A Century of Dishonor*, which listed the failures of the federal government's policies toward Native Americans. About the same time, Sarah Winnemucca, a Paiute reformer, lectured in the East about the injustices of reservation life.

Many well-meaning reformers felt that assimilation was the only way for Native Americans to survive. Assimilation meant adopting the culture of the people around them. Reformers wanted to make Native Americans like whites—to “Americanize” them.

The **Dawes Act**, passed in 1887, was intended to encourage Native Americans to give up their traditional ways and become farmers. The act divided reservations into individual plots of land for each family. The government sold leftover land to white settlers. The government also sent many Native American children to special boarding schools where they were taught white culture. In “One American’s Story,” you read about the effort to Americanize Buffalo Bird Woman. But these attempts to Americanize the children still did not make them part of white society.

In the end, the Dawes Act did little to benefit Native Americans. Not all of them wanted to be farmers. Those who did lacked the tools, training, and money to be successful. Over time, many sold their land for a fraction of its real value to white land promoters or settlers.

The situation of Native Americans at the end of the 1800s was tragic. Their lands had been taken and their culture treated with contempt. Not until decades later would the federal government recognize the importance of their way of life. In the next section, you will read about some of the people who settled on Native American lands.

Reading History
Analyzing
Points of View
Why did reform-
ers support
assimilation?

INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

GET A HOME
OF
YOUR OWN
EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE
POSSSESSION
WITHIN
THIRTY DAYS

FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED GRAZING AGRICULTURAL
IRRIGABLE DRY FARMING

BY 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR FEEL IT WOULD BE ADVISABLE TO OFFER LAND AT FOLLOWING RATES:

State	Acres	Price	State	Acres	Price
Colorado	5,213,231	\$7.27	Oklahoma	14,654,007	\$10.00
Idaho	7,013,000	24.85	Oregon	1,025,000	25.42
Montana	2,884,500	33.65	South Dakota	1,120,000	26.57
Nebraska	11,354,000	7.30	Washington	4,879,000	42.31
North Dakota	5,941,000	34.65	Wyoming	2,086,000	27.90
West Dakota	22,913,000	7.95	Wyoming	2,086,000	27.90

FOR THE YEAR 1910 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 350,000 ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE

WALTER L. FISHER, ROBERT G. VALENTINE

This poster advertised the sale of Native American lands to white settlers.

Section 2 Assessment

1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- reservation
- Sand Creek Massacre
- Sitting Bull
- George A. Custer
- Battle of the Little Bighorn
- Wounded Knee Massacre
- Dawes Act

2. Using Graphics

Use a chart to compare the life of Plains people before and after the arrival of white settlers.

	Before	After
Meeting survival needs		
Customs		
Land use		

3. Main Ideas

a. How did federal government policy toward Native Americans change as white settlers moved to the West?

b. How did the destruction of the buffalo affect Plains peoples?

c. Why was Wounded Knee a turning point in relations between Native Americans and the government?

4. Critical Thinking

Recognizing Effects How were the effects of the Dawes Act different from what was intended?

THINK ABOUT

- goals of the act
- impact on the land use, culture, and independence of the Plains peoples

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

TECHNOLOGY

SPEECH

Research the life of a Native American leader discussed in this section. Create that person's **Web page** or give a **speech** from this person's perspective.