

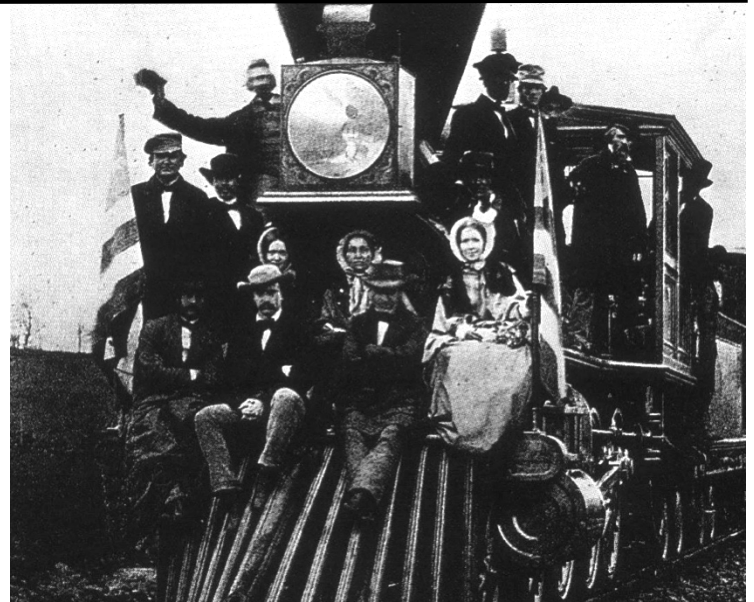
# THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE AMERICAN WEST

## Westward Expansion Threatens Native Culture

Probably never before in human experience had so huge an area been transformed so rapidly. The transformation of the United States from an agricultural to an increasingly industrialized and urbanized society brought about significant economic, political, diplomatic, social, environmental, and cultural changes. Following the Civil War, government subsidies for transportation and communication systems opened new markets in North America, and though most

Plains Indian peoples supported the Union during the war, they were rewarded with shrinking territory and federal military campaigns to crush their resistance to white encroachment. From 1868 to about 1890, almost incessant warfare raged in various parts of the West between native peoples and whites.

As transcontinental railroads were completed, bringing more settlers west, U.S. military actions, the destruction of the buffalo, the confinement of American Indians to reservations, and assimilationist policies reduced the number of American Indians and threatened native culture and identity.



### TRIBAL LIFE VIEWED AS PRIMITIVE AND UNCHRISTIAN



Sitting Bull poses with Buffalo Bill in 1885.

Post-Civil War migration to the American West, encouraged by economic opportunities and government policies, caused the federal government to violate treaties with American Indian nations in order to expand the amount of land available to settlers. New government policies included subsidies and the establishment of land-grant colleges.

The competition for land in the West among white settlers, Indians, and Mexican Americans led to an increase in violent conflict. The U.S. government generally responded to American Indian resistance with military force, eventually dispersing tribes onto small reservations and hoping to end American Indian tribal identities through assimilation.

The Doolittle Commission, established in 1867, reported on the condition of Indian tribes and developed guidelines for reducing territory and putting Indians on reservations. The Peace Commission, which lasted for about 20 years, developed strategies to carry out plans of the Doolittle Commission. The commission negotiated treaties for land and maintained that tribes should be self-sustaining with government direction. Under the Bureau of Indian Commissioners, a collection of prominent citizens who advised the president, reservations were divided between religious groups, mostly Quakers, to direct the *civilizing* of native peoples.

The view of tribal life as primitive and unchristian became the justification for the reservation system. Reservations, it was argued, provided a more efficient way to correct the primitiveness, and it solved the problem of intermixing. Also, many argued that communal native culture was a threat to national values. Whites wanted access to land for livestock, mining, railroads, land speculators and farming. Many government and military officials even saw the reservation as a proper form of punishment for resistance. Humanitarians argued the process of civilizing Indians would lead to integration and assimilation.

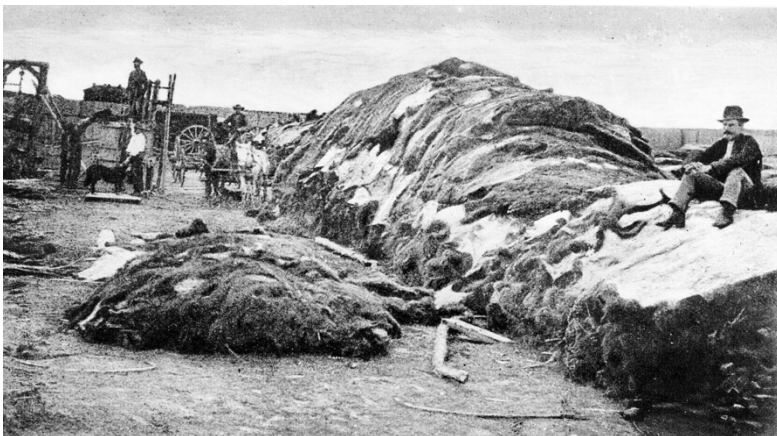
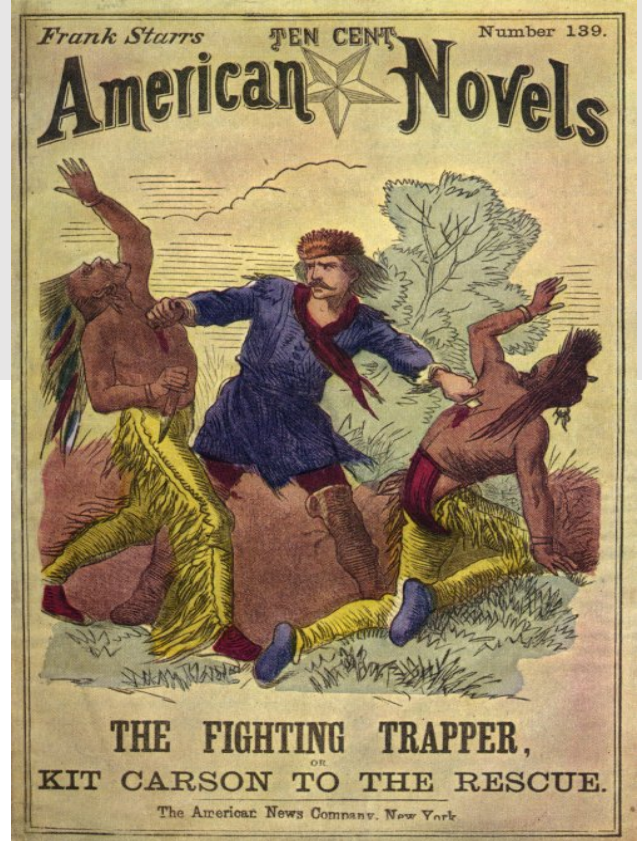
The *Cherokee Tobacco* court case had led to the end of the treaty phase in U.S. policy toward native peoples, and it helped usher in the reservation phase. Cherokee businesses had always been exempted from taxes under a federal treaty, but Cherokee tobacco farmers were seen as a threat, and white tobacco farmers urged Congress to pass a law removing their tax exemption. Cherokee Tobacco argued to the Supreme Court that federal laws and treaties were superior to congressional law. The Supreme Court responded, "That only holds when dealing with a foreign nation, and *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1830) ruled that the Cherokee nation was a domestic dependent nation, not an independent sovereign nation." Congress passed a law that officially ended the treaty process in 1871.

# The Horse Transforms the Way of Life of the Plains Peoples

The horse had transformed the life of the Plains Indian, causing them to become more nomadic. As buffalo herds dwindled, competition and warfare among native Plains peoples intensified. The federal government tried treaty-making with the “chiefs” of various tribes at Fort Laramie in 1851, but native peoples living in scattered bands usually recognized no authority past their own immediate family or village elder.

As the new United States developed, the Plains Indian, bedecked in headdress, living in tipis, and riding horses to hunt buffalo, became the stereotype for all native peoples. This image developed in large part because of the paintings of George Catlin who spent a number of years on the Great Plains in the 1830s.

Paintings, such as *Hunting Bison* shown in the top right, became popular in the East and Europe. Illustrators who had never been to the West imitated his images and by the late 1800s, the Plains Indian became synonymous with all native peoples. Dime novelists, such as the one to the right, began portraying a savage Plains Indian who massacred white cowboys and settlers.



## “THE GREAT SLAUGHTER”:

(top left): 40,000 buffalo hides in Dodge City, Kansas in 1878; (bottom left): An 1870’s mound of American bison skulls waiting to be ground for fertilizer. Railways, rifles, and an international market for buffalo hides led to “the Great Slaughter” from about 1820 to 1880,

## BUFFALO PUSHED TO BRINK OF EXTINCTION

Disease, the building of railroads, and the massacre of the buffalo herds “tamed” the Plains Indians. Buffalo were slain for their hides, for a few choice cuts of meat,

or simply for amusement. William “Buffalo Bill” Cody killed over four thousand animals in eighteen months while employed by the Kansas Pacific. At the close of the Civil War, some 15 million buffalo still grazed the Great Plains. By 1885, fewer than a thousand buffalo were left, pushing the species to the brink of extinction and thereby challenging the Native American way of life and leading to increased conflict between tribes.

## FEROCIOUS WARFARE INTENSIFIED ON THE PLAINS

In the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, Colonel Chivington's militia massacred in cold blood some four hundred natives who thought they had been promised immunity. Women were shot praying for mercy and children had their brains dashed out. Braves were tortured, scalped and mutilated. A young lieutenant told Colonel Chivington that to attack the Indians would be a violation of pledges.

He describes Chivington's response, *"His reply was, bringing his fist down close to my face, 'Damn any man who sympathizes with Indians.' I told him what pledges were given the Indians. He replied that they 'had come to kill Indians and believed it to be honorable to kill Indians under any and all circumstances.'"*

Ferocious warfare on the Great Plains intensified following the Civil War.

In 1866 a Sioux war party ambushed Captain Fetterman's command of 81 soldiers and civilians in Wyoming's Big Horn Mountains. The war party killed and mutilated every

soldier. In 1868 the government abandoned its attempt to construct the Bozeman Trail through Montana, and the Great Sioux Reservation was guaranteed to the Sioux tribes.

However, in 1874, Custer discovered gold in the Black Hills and hordes of greedy gold seekers rushed to Dakota Territory. Sitting Bull and warrior Crazy Horse led the resistance against white encroachment, and in 1876, Custer and his 264 officers and men were completely wiped out. The painting to the left shows the Battle of Little Bighorn from the perspective of the Sioux.

Similarly, when gold was discovered on the Nez Perce

reservation in Idaho, the U.S. government shrunk its size by 90 percent. Chief Joseph surrendered after a tortuous 1,700-mile, three-month trek into Canada where he had hoped to rendezvous with Sitting Bull. Tricked into believing that they would be returned to their ancestral lands, the Nez Perce were instead sent to a dusty reservation in Kansas where 40 percent died from disease.

Fierce Apache tribes of Arizona and New Mexico were the most difficult to subdue. Led by Geronimo, they were pursued into Mexico by federal troops until finally persuaded to surrender after their women had been exiled to Florida. Geronimo's 1886 surrender marked the end of armed resistance on the plains. The Apache ultimately became successful farmers in Oklahoma.

**(below): Geronimo and his family on a reservation in Oklahoma following his surrender. The picture to the right shows Geronimo and surrendered Apache on a train to Florida.**



# Reluctant Conquerors: Soldiers Tell All

Historian Thomas C. Leonard's study "Reluctant Conquerors: American Army Officers and the Plains Indians" concentrates on the emotions and feelings of the soldiers rather than on their actions. He argues that the soldiers greatly respected the Plains Indians and did not relish their job, though they followed through on orders to subdue native resistance.

**General Philip H. Sheridan:** "We took away their country and their means of support, broke up their mode of living, their habits of life, introduced disease and decay among them and it was for this and against this they made war. Could anyone expect less?"

**General George Crook wrote:** "With all his faults, and he has many, the American Indian is not half so black as he has been painted. He is cruel in war, treacherous at time, and not over cleanly. But so were our forefathers. His nature, however, is thrown in without stint or measure."

*responsive to treatment which assures him that it is based upon justice, truth, honesty, and common sense."*

**General George A. Custer:** "To me, Indian life, with its attendant ceremonies, mysteries, and forms, is a book of unceasing interest. Grant that some of its pages are frightful, and, if possible, to be avoided, yet the attraction is none the weaker. Study him, fight him, civilize him if you can, he remains still the object of your curiosity, a type of man peculiar and undefined, subjecting himself to no known law of civilization, contending determinedly against all efforts to win him from his chosen mode of life. If I were an Indian, I think I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my people who adhered to the free open plains rather than submit to the confined limits of a reservation, there to be the recipient of the blessed benefits of civilization, with its vices

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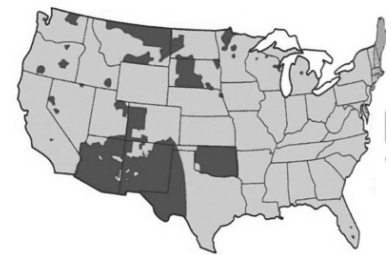
**Once in control of the entire continent, Native Americans now control only two percent of U.S. territory.**



1790



1860



1880



1890



2000

The Dawes Act in 1887 changed common tribal lands into individual allotments. Nearly 90 million acres of tribal land were lost before the act was repealed in 1932. Since then, through court battles and federal recognition of old claims, some Indian lands have been restored to the tribes.

# Americanization Phase Kicks off with Dawes Act

**Carlisle Indian School, 1879** - Native children were separated from their tribes, taught English and immersed in white values and customs in order to “kill the Indian and save the man.



U.S. policy toward Native Americans entered its **Americanization phase** with the passage of the **Dawes Severalty Act of 1887**. It dissolved tribes as legal entities, wiped out tribal ownership of land, and set up individual family heads with 160 free acres. Citizenship was granted to those natives who “broke from the tribe,” lived on their own individual plot of land, and adopted “civilized” ways. The Remaining land was sold to railroad companies and white settlers, with the proceeds going to Indian schools, which became another tool to Americanize them.

Ultimately, the Dawes Act placed 47 million acres of land in the hands of Native Americans, while land distributed to white settlers reached 90 million acres. Native peoples were forced to be farmers even though they did not know how or want to farm, and the best land went to white settlers when they swindled unknowing Native Americans. By 1900, native peoples had lost 50 percent of the 156 million acres of land they had held just twenty years prior.

The Americanization phase went hand in hand with Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century. U.S. policy aimed to assimilate native peoples into American society. Americanization was touted as an avenue to self-sufficiency. Private property would replace a communal society, and Native Americans could be educated and Christianized in the white man’s model. Assimilation would be the best path to detribalization, or the destruction of the political and social structures of the tribes.

It wasn’t until the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 that U.S. policy shifted. It partially reversed the government policy of forced assimilation that had been in place for nearly half a century, and it tried to restore tribal basis of Indian life.



## GHOST DANCE OUTLAWED

By the 1880s, the national conscience began to stir uneasily over the plight of native peoples. Helen Hunt Jackson wrote *A Century of Dishonor* in 1881, revealing a sorry record of government ruthlessness and dirty dealings. Regardless, even Christian reformers cared little for traditional native traditions. In 1884 zealous reformers persuaded the federal government to outlaw the sacred Sun Dance, which became the Ghost Dance cult, that had originated under Wovoka of the Paiute Indians in the 1870s and later spread to the Dakota



Sioux. The Ghost Dance was a religious movement that represented native attempts to revive their traditional native culture in reaction to the Americanization phase that promoted assimilation. Adherents to the Ghost Dance ritual believed that wearing their “Ghost Shirts” would protect them from soldiers’ bullets in active resistance to white oppression.

It was within this tense cultural context that the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 occurred. When, in 1890, U.S. cavalry troops entered the Lakota Reservation near Wounded Knee Creek to disarm the Lakota, a misunderstanding led to the massacre. By the time the guns fell silent, an estimated 200 Sioux men, women and children lay dead along with 29 soldiers.





**Hopi Snake Dance — Appealed to late nineteenth-century Americans who wanted to hold onto the exotic elements of native life. By 1882, wide-circulation magazines brought the ritual, often sensationally, to millions of viewers.**

# NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION MOSTLY URBAN TODAY

By 1887, the total number of native peoples had been reduced to about 243,000. Today, the 1990 census counted some 1.5 million Native Americans, urban and rural.

Today, "Native Americans are a mostly urban population. The migration of Native Americans to the cities expanded rapidly during and after World War II. During the war, many people left the reservations to either enter the armed forces or to find work in the booming factories of the war-time. Immediately after the war, the Indian Relocation Program moved many Native Americans from the reservations to cities as part of an attempt to assimilate them and remove the "dependent nation" or ward-ship status of the tribes. During this period, thousands of Native American families were moved to cities, especially western cities such as Los Angeles" (Robinson, *American Studies Journal*).

## WHAT DOES TURNER IMPLY?

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner argued, "Up to our own day, American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." The frontier was officially declared closed in 1890. The frontier had been a state of mind, a symbol of opportunity. Its closing ended a romantic phase in American history and created new economic and psychological problems for Americans.



*American Progress* by George Crogutt, 1873: Hovering goddess-like above the westward moving pioneers, this symbolic female came to represent the goodness of taming the western frontier.