

The Indian Wars 1861-1876

Tension increased between Plains Indians and settlers — this eventually broke out into a series of conflicts.

Railroads, Ranching and Gold angered the Plains Indians

- 1) Railroad companies often clashed with the Plains Indians. They sold land on the Plains to settlers and frequently built railroads through Native American lands, even if it violated treaties.
- 2) Railroad companies also encouraged the hunting of buffalo — both to feed the railway construction gangs, and to make money by transporting hunters. The construction of the railroads divided herds and made them easier to hunt.
- 3) Buffalo were a very important resource for Native Americans (see p.58), so some tribes derailed trains and ambushed workmen. In response, the military built forts to safeguard the railroad.
- 4) Ranchers also clashed with the Plains Indians. They were attacked because their cattle drives went through Indian land and they built ranches on Indian territories, disrupting buffalo herds. Oliver Loving (see p.70) died in 1867 after a fight with Comanches.
- 5) When gold was discovered in Montana in 1862, miners arrived in the area and searched for gold on Indian reservation land, breaking the treaties which had promised this land to the Native Americans.



© The Art Archive / Cranger Collection

Sioux raiding a train on the Great Plains.

Comment and Analysis

The effects of railroads and increased settlement were long lasting and contributed to the destruction of the Plains Indians' culture after 1877 (see p.73).

Many Plains Indians were *Unhappy* with the reservation policy

- 1) More Indians were moved onto reservations as more settlers came to live on the Plains.
- 2) Life on reservations varied. The Navajos achieved peace and prosperity after 1868 when a treaty with the US allowed them sufficient reservation area in their homeland.
- 3) Other tribes were moved off their homeland and onto unfamiliar territory. They were encouraged to farm the land, which went against their culture and nomadic lifestyle.
- 4) Often reservation lands were insufficient and unsuitable for farming — some tribes faced starvation.
- 5) If the lands were good, they were often grabbed by settlers, despite the promises in the government treaties. Many chiefs also lacked the authority to make their tribes keep to the agreements.
- 6) Many tribes wanted peace, but the situation had become intolerable. They were forced into conflict during the 1860s in a series of Indian Wars.

Many Plains tribes were still able to hunt buffalo, but only within certain areas.

It isn't surprising that the Native Americans went to war. The government had given them the Great Plains (see p.57), but then repeatedly broke its promises and forced tribes onto ever-smaller areas of land.

Little Crow's War was an uprising in Minnesota — 1862

- 1) The first major Indian War was Little Crow's War. Little Crow was the chief of the Santee Sioux, also known as the Dakota, who lived on a reservation in Minnesota.
- 2) They were peaceful and accepted reservation life. But they nearly starved as a result of Civil War shortages, a delay in their payment from the government, cheating by traders and a poor harvest.
- 3) In August 1862, four Dakota returning from an unsuccessful hunt murdered five settlers for a dare. Fearing retaliation on the entire tribe, Little Crow reluctantly led his warriors in an uprising. Hundreds of settlers and about 100 soldiers were killed, and the town of New Ulm was burned.
- 4) The uprising was ended when the Dakota were defeated at Wood Lake in September. 38 Dakota prisoners were hanged and most of the Dakota were expelled from what was left of their land.

Railroads didn't have a positive impact on everybody...

Explain the impact of railroads on the Plains Indians. Give examples to support your answer. [10]



The Indian Wars 1861-1876

More Indian Wars followed during the 1860s. The Sioux then won a major battle against the US in 1876.

The Cheyenne Uprising and the Sand Creek Massacre — 1864

- 1) In 1863, the Cheyenne faced starvation because they couldn't grow enough food on their infertile reservation land at Sand Creek or find any buffalo. They decided to raid settlers' wagon trains for food. There was further violence between Indians and the army during 1864.
- 2) Chief Black Kettle, who wanted peace, moved his band to a camp where he believed they would be safe. But in November 1864, Colonel John Chivington attacked the camp while most of the band's men were out hunting. Of the 500 people left in the camp, at least 163 were killed — mostly women and children.
- 3) The Cheyenne, Arapaho and Sioux retaliated by attacking ranches and other settlements, and killing those inside, including women and children. The central Plains erupted into war.

Red Cloud's War and the Bozeman Trail — 1866-1868

- 1) The Bozeman Trail was established to link the gold fields in Montana with the Oregon Trail. However, this trail passed through the hunting grounds of the Sioux, which had been guaranteed to them by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.
- 2) The Sioux attacked travellers who used the trail, so the army wanted to build forts to protect them. Talks were held with Red Cloud, a Sioux chief, to negotiate the building of these forts, but they were abandoned when the Sioux saw soldiers marching out to begin building before any deal had been made.
- 3) The Sioux began to attack the army. In a major incident known as Fetterman's Trap, the Sioux ambushed Captain W.J. Fetterman and his troops — Fetterman and all 80 of his men were killed.
- 4) As a result, the US army surrendered and abandoned the forts. This was a major defeat for the army.
 - Red Cloud eventually signed the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, which created a large Sioux reservation on an area that included the sacred Black Hills of Dakota. The government also agreed not to rebuild their forts on the Bozeman Trail.
 - Red Cloud promised never again to make war on the settlers — and kept his promise. But not all of the Sioux bands agreed with the treaty.



Red Cloud.

© The Art Archive / Cranger Collection

The Great Sioux War — 1876-1877

- 1) The Great Sioux War was sparked by the discovery of gold in the Black Hills of Dakota in 1874. The US government tried to buy the Black Hills from the Sioux, but they refused — the hills were sacred to them and had been guaranteed to them by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868.
- 2) Despite the Sioux's refusal to sell the Black Hills, miners arrived there to search for gold. In protest, many of the Sioux left the reservation and gathered in Montana in the Bighorn Valley.
- 3) By the start of 1876, the Sioux chiefs Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse had raised a force of several thousand men, so the US government sent soldiers against them. The Sioux launched a successful attack on the soldiers while they were resting, killing 28 of them. This became known as the Battle of the Rosebud.
- 4) The government planned another attack on the Sioux 8 days later, led by Lt. Col. George Custer. Custer was ambitious and decided to attack without waiting for the rest of the army. Custer and all 225 of his men were killed. The Battle of Little Bighorn was the greatest Native American victory in battle against the US army. However, this only strengthened the resolve of the army to defeat the Indians.

Little Bighorn was a major Native American victory...

Summarise the main conflicts of the Indian Wars, including the key people and what they did.

