

Conflict with the Indigenous Nations I - Overview

FOUR STAGES OF THE CONFLICT

1. 1800-1851 : Permanent Indian Frontier

- POLICY:

When the USA government bought Louisiana (ie, the Great Plains) from the French in 1803, it suggested it as the place for the Indigenous Nations to live. It forced all Indigenous people in the eastern United States (Cherokee, Seminole etc) to move to Oklahoma ('The Trail of Tears').

- PRESSURES:

1803-1851: Oregon Trail (1840). California Trail (to the goldfields 1849). Mormon Trail (1846) ... all crossing the Plains.

- RESULTS:

First skirmishes between settlers and Indigenous warriors on the Plains.

2. 1851-1867 : Concentration

- POLICY:

In the Fort Laramie Treaty (1851) the Government *reserved* each Indigenous tribe a specific area to live in – eg the Sioux agreed to stay in the area around the Black Hills of Dakota – "for all time".

- PRESSURES:

1851-1867: Regular stage to California. Gold discovered in Colorado (1859). First farmers onto Plains (1862). Goodnight-Loving trail (1866).

- RESULTS:

Indian Wars of 1860-67:

- The Cheyenne went to war (1861) when the government forced them onto a small reservation at Sand Creek. Massacre of Sand Creek (1864).
- Red Cloud led the Sioux in a successful war against the US (1866-67).

3. 1867-1875 : Small Reservations

- POLICY:

President Grant offered the Indigenous Chiefs small reservations. At Medicine Lodge (1867) the government agreed to provide food, medicine etc if the Indigenous Chiefs agreed.

- PRESSURES:

1867-1885: Railways. Cow towns. Gold discovered in Black Hills (1870). Supplies to the reservations are inadequate. Many Americans wanted to exterminate the Indigenous Peoples. Slaughter of buffalo.

- RESULTS:

'Indian Wars' of 1875-85:

- Custer and his force wiped out at the Battle of Little Bighorn (1876).
- Army swelled by Custer's Avengers. Surrender of Indigenous Chiefs (1885).

4. 1885-1890 : Opening up the Indian Lands

- POLICY:

After 1885 the government opened up the Indigenous reservations to white settlers – the Dawes Act (1887).

- POLICY & PRESSURES:

In 1885 the Indigenous law courts were abolished. Boarding Schools and assimilation.

- RESULTS:

Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee (1890).