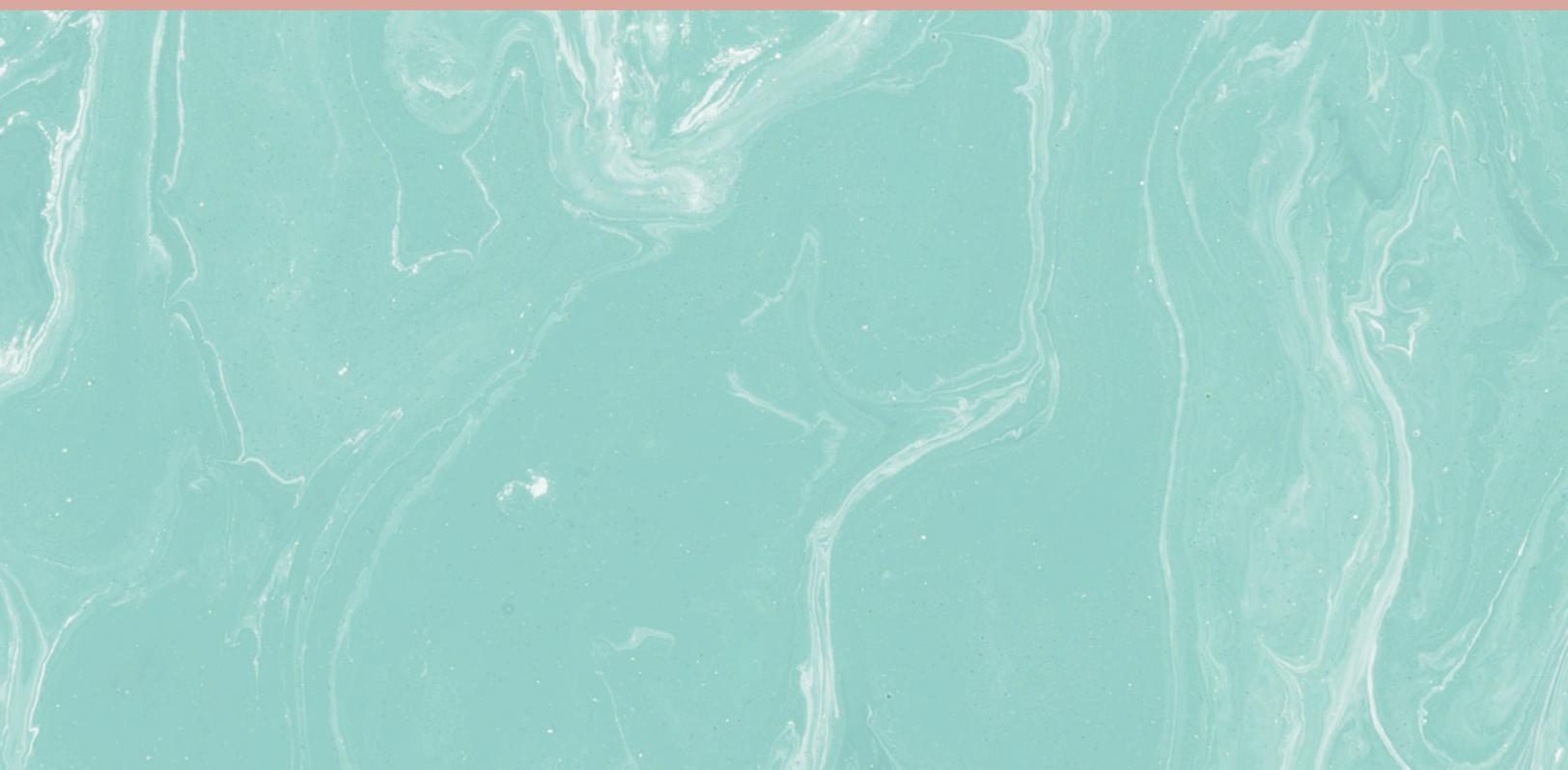




TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

The Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination of Native Americans

AN EXPERT GUIDE BY JESSICA KEATING





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An Overview of Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination

Native peoples encountered non-native groups, including the Spanish, French, and Norse, as early as the 16th century. Although colloquially Americans tend to refer to indigenous groups as “Native Americans” or “Indians,” there existed and still exists tremendous diversity among Native peoples. When the first European settlers encountered Native groups in what is present-day United States, they encountered diverse peoples and tribes, ranging in size and organization, and with distinct cultures and ways of life. In other words, there is no such thing as a “generic” Native American. Likewise, the Native experience of European settlement and expansion was not monolithic as some over-simplified histories tend to imply; rather, it varied greatly across time and indigenous groups. For example, some Native groups engaged in lively trade with European traders-- the fur trade with the French, is just one example--and Jesuit priests, known as “Black Robes” learned the Lakota language and lived with tribal communities, from the late 16th- to early 19th-century. However, alongside this history of economic and intercultural encounters between Native peoples and Euro-Americans, is a long history of systematic policies of assimilation,

removal, and even elimination, particularly during the sixty year period between 1830-1890. Though Native tribes did not all have the same experiences with US government officials or its policies, it is possible to form a general picture of how these policies impacted various Native peoples. The government’s programs of assimilation, removal, and, when necessary, elimination, wrought profound and lasting effects on Native American tribes and communities.

“
*They made us many promises, more than I
can remember, but they never kept but one;
they promised to take our land, and they
took it.”¹*

—CHIEF RED CLOUD

According to the Enlightenment ideal of progress that characterized the 19th century, many white Americans believed that Native peoples were not only capable of radically changing their cultures and lifestyles, but that Native people would even view assimilative measures of advancement as preferable over their own culture. The government advanced assimilative

¹ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Henry Holt & co. 2000 [1970]), 449.

Prior to the 1960s and 70s, the words “savages” and “redskins” were common in letters and government documents. Even today, history textbooks still use the word, “savage” to describe Native people in general and the term “squaw,” a slur directed toward indigenous women. Some of these slurs come directly from government propaganda campaigns that have tried to portray Native people as “uncivilized.” The remnants of such derogatory propaganda is still evident in the names and mascots of various sports teams.

policies in several ways, including stipulations laid out in treaties. For instance, treaties with the Plains tribes, such as the Crow, Sioux, and Cheyenne, often required that they give up the traditional ways of life, including the practice of traditional religion, and stop harassing the westward flow of white settlers in exchange for food and other goods, the promise of land, as well as protection against white encroachment on their lands. The government repeatedly broke these treaties when they impeded access to desirable land or gold. Assimilation was also advanced through education. More progressive government officials and ecclesial groups, some of whom considered themselves friends of the Native Americans, created schools and institutions which aimed to assimilate Native peoples into Euro-Americans culture and values.

In addition to assimilative policies, the government also seized Native lands. The rise of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, with its emphasis on the Enlightenment ideal of progress, purportedly justified westward expansion across the entire continental United States as the divinely ordained destiny of the American project, and with it, the invasions and appropriation of Native lands. As the US government and white settlers saw it,

the advancement of the “American project” sanctioned the systematic and forcible removal of Native groups. For instance, in his first speech to Congress in 1829, newly elected president, Andrew Jackson, known as Sharp Knife among Native peoples, proposed the establishment of a “permanent Indian frontier.” He recommended the removal of all Native tribes in the eastern United States to the “ample district west of the Mississippi” where they would be left undisturbed by whites.² Many remnant tribes in what was by that time the eastern United States, including Hurons, Miamis, Shawnees, and Ottawas, along with the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, and Creeks gave up their ancestral lands and made their way West. Others, such as the Cherokee, were forcibly removed from their homelands, and were herded like cattle hundreds of miles to the westward to government designated territories. Among the most infamous of these forced removals is the Trail of Tears, during which one in every four Cherokees died from disease, exposure, or starvation.⁴ The Trail of Tears is perhaps the best known instance of forced relocation, but the government also implemented many other forced removals, including the infamous Navajo Long Walk.

² Brown, 5.

Assimilation

Different groups had different motives for promoting boarding schools. The US government saw them as a way to eliminate the “Indian problem,”⁵ and thus clear the way for cultural and economic advancement (i.e., mining and agriculture). Ecclesial groups, both Protestant and Catholic, along with some government officials, primarily saw themselves as attempting to aid Native people through a program of moral, religious, and cultural reformation. A common view at the time held that Native groups were dying breeds, doomed to extinction if they could not learn to read, write, and assimilate to the European way of life. Richard Pratt, for instance, the founder of the first federally-run native boarding school, seemed to believe that Native peoples were equal to white Americans. Native peoples simply had to be trained in the ways of “civilization” (i.e., white Americans) while abandoning their old ways. Indeed, some schools were even opened at the behest of Native leaders. In 1877, Chief Red Cloud, a Lakota war chief and a shrewd statesman, petitioned the US government to allow the Jesuits to open a school on the newly-established Pine Ridge Agency for the very practical purpose of teaching Native children how to read and write, skills he believed they needed in order to survive in the white world.

Though ecclesial and religious actors had different aims (i.e. evangelization) than those of the government (i.e., economic growth, land appropriation, and “pacification”), many of their methods of assimilation overlapped. As part of this effort, children were

“Convinced that ‘savage’ Indians could not survive in close proximity to ‘civilized’ Americans, they concluded that there were only two future alternatives for Native people. They would either remain ‘uncivilized,’ die out, and become extinct, or, preferably, they would become ‘civilized,’ thrive, and enter American society.”³

systematically removed from their homes and communities, where their native dress was replaced by Euro-American dress. Children were also forbidden to speak their native language and practice native customs, including religion. In fact, many traditional indigenous ceremonies, rites, and rituals remained illegal until the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978. In this way, most schools advanced some version of the sentiment often attributed to the founder of the notorious Carlisle Indian School, “Kill the Indian, save the man.” In other words, assimilation was elimination by other means. Boarding schools not only separated students from their homes and families, but also placed them in an environment which they could not comprehend, let alone navigate. Boarding schools required children to learn a foreign culture and fundamentally alter their identities in ways that ranged from language to

³ Theda Perdue, “Civilization and Removal,” in *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Southeast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 76.

⁴ Brown, 7.

⁵ In one sense assimilation and elimination may be viewed as two approaches to the same question -- how to solve the “Indian” problem, the problem of their very existence which was an impediment to westward expansion. See Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Ballentine, 1993), 38-42. Utley writes of the westward expansion through Lakota country: “Conquest of the wilderness meant destruction of the Indians. About the means of destruction, however there was disagreement. They could be either destroyed outright by killing or, consistent with the tenets of progress, elevated from savagery to civilization. In either event, since the generic Indian (live savagery and civilization) was a white conception, they ceased to exist” (42).

economics to religion. To make matters worse, children suffered malnutrition in unsanitary conditions that were rife with physical and verbal abuse. Whatever the intention of boarding schools, they had many negative effects, resulting in the personal and social trauma of many indigenous peoples.

The boarding school project began with day schools on native reservations. However, government officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs soon realized that the schools were ineffective at making native students conform to western standards of living. Because of this, they implemented residential boarding schools on or near the reservations. Yet, large numbers of students fled these schools and returned home to their families. Thus, began the rise of the off-reservation boarding school, like Carlisle Indian School, where students lived hundreds of miles from their families and where school officials forcibly divested them

of their language, religion, and culture. With new inventions such as the steam engine train, it became easier to separate children from their families at schools hundreds of miles away.

Officials in charge of implementing the boarding schools often believed that the schools were good for native people, and certainly thought them a boon for American society at large. Some of the schools included work programs in which Native students apprenticed with a craftsman to learn the skills of a marketable trade, benefiting both the student and the economy. Students also learned skills, such as reading and writing and values necessary to survive within American society. However, values such as individualism and ideas of strong private property rights undermined long-standing traditions of community and interconnectivity prevalent in many Native groups.

The Conditions of Boarding Schools

Students removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools encountered an overwhelming plethora of enforced change. When students first arrived they were often given new English names and their long hair was cut in the European fashion. The shorning of one's hair was particularly traumatic since hair holds spiritual significance among many tribes. Dorothy Peche, a member of the Shoshone tribe, who attended a federal boarding school, later described the day when school officials cut her hair, saying it was as though they "cut [her] throat."⁶ Old clothes were confiscated and replaced with new school uniforms, which were sometimes old military uniforms. Most devastatingly, perhaps, school officials banned

students from speaking their Native languages and forced them to speak only English.

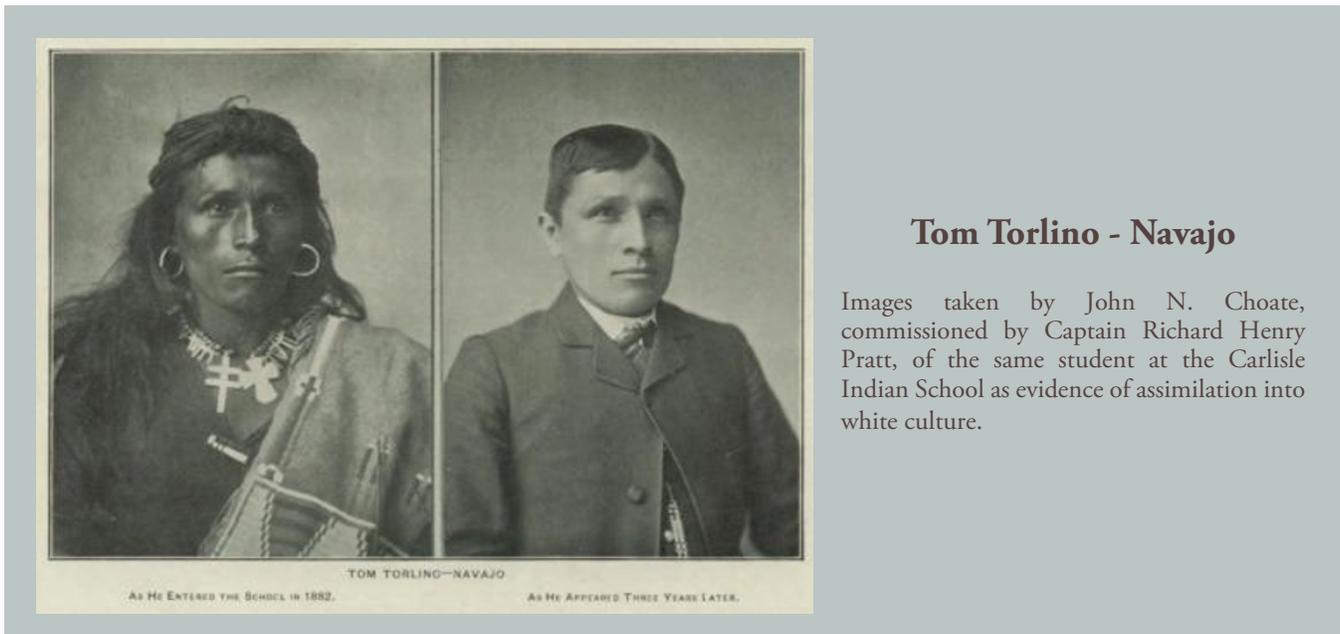
Not only did students have to adjust to white conceptions of space and organization, they were also forced to adhere to white conceptions of time and order. Day-to-day operations of the school were highly regimented, even militaristic in order to instill order and discipline in the students. School staff often inflicted severe, corporal punishment for minor infractions, such as speaking in one's Native language. Students who refused to assimilate were often beaten or given other cruel punishments. The teachers and staff of the schools were often underqualified.

⁶ *Major Problems in American Indian History: Documents and Essays*, ed. Albert Hurtado, et al. (Samford: Cengage Learning, 2015), 371-3.

Many who taught at or staffed boarding schools did so because they could not otherwise obtain employment at schools back East or had been fired from previous jobs. Many were former military members who were not qualified for their positions.

Boarding schools were overcrowded and rampant with disease, and students suffered physical or emotional abuse in addition to malnourishment. Dorothy Peche, recalled the utter disregard school officials showed for the unsanitary conditions of the school. For instance, she described officials forcing as many students as possible to wash at the same time in the school's only tub. She also recalled that the school had a jail in the basement where students who disobeyed school policies, such as speaking their Native language, were detained for long periods of time. While in this windowless room, students were forced to sit in the dark and subsist on bread and water.⁷ Students also endured abuse during their work programs. Some white families who participated in the apprenticeship programs worked children for long hours in poor conditions.

Leaders of federal boarding schools allowed very little contact between students and their families. In fact, administrators even forged replies to parents' letters to make it seem as though the students were thriving at the school. Some students attempted to run away, with varied success. The distance from a school to one's home could span from just a few miles to hundreds of miles, which often meant students died in their attempt to escape the schools. Between the deaths of these students and those who died from malnutrition and poor living conditions, diseases like tuberculosis, measles, and pneumonia, and other causes, the mortality rate was high. Some school superintendents falsified the number of deaths in official reports sent to the federal government to make it appear as though numbers were lower than they actually were. For this reason, it is difficult to establish the death rate. However, some early reports suggest that up to 20% of students died either at school or shortly after returning home.⁸



⁷ Hurtado, 371-3.

⁸ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Wichita: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 97-135, esp. 124-131.

Removal

Throughout the 19th century, white settlers continued to push West, as the US government sought to expand its political and economic reach. Westward expansion required the appropriation of Native peoples' land. The government took several different approaches acquiring the land of tribal nations, including direct treaty-making with Native Americans, legislative action, the decimation of food supplies, and forcible removal. In the East, many Native tribes were wiped out from diseases that European settlers brought to the continent. Of those that remained, some smaller tribes were able to negotiate with the government; however, by and large, the US government sought to remove Native peoples to "Indian country." Andrew Jackson, who believed that Native tribes and whites could not live together peacefully, promoted the establishment of a "permanent Indian frontier," to run from the Mississippi River to the 95th meridian (though even this boundary would change before the law went into effect because of white encroachment into the proposed territory).⁹ Some tribes signed the Indian Removal Treaty, choosing to move westward to live in peace away from the growing white population, while others acceded to giving up large swaths of land and remaining on smaller reservations. The Chichasaw nation, for example, sold their land and used the money to purchase supplies, including livestock and slaves for the move. Other tribal nations refused to sign such treaties, which often resulted in the threat of military violence and land theft. One such example is the Cherokee Nation, which refused to sign the Indian Removal Treaty. The Cherokee Nation resorted to the law, appealing twice to the U.S. Supreme Court, first in 1830 and again in 1831. The Cherokee won

their second appeal in *Worcester v. Georgia* in 1831. The Court ruled that the state of Georgia could not appropriate the land of the sovereign Cherokee Nation and was beyond its rights in distributing said land as part of statewide land lottery allotments.¹⁰ Despite the Cherokee success in the highest Court of the US government, both the state of Georgia and President Jackson refused to enforce the Court's ruling. A Native tribe had appealed to the highest court of the US government and triumphed, yet to no avail. The Cherokee were forcibly removed from their homeland in 1838 in what is now known as "The Trail of Tears." The Cherokees' forced removal was preceded by a period of internment. Many of the deaths counted among the Trail of Tears actually occurred prior to the walk while the Cherokee languished in these camps.¹¹

“A Native tribe had appealed to the highest court of the US government and triumphed, yet to no avail. The Cherokee were forcibly removed from their homeland in 1838 in what is now known as “The Trail of Tears.”

Both at the state and federal levels, legislators passed laws which made it nearly impossible for Native peoples to protect their land rights. The Dawes Act in 1887 is perhaps the most well-known land allotment program. It strove to divest Native peoples of their land by breaking up traditional practices of land tenure and converting tribally held land into allotments of private property. Prior to the Dawes Act, federal and state governments made efforts to remove Native peoples

⁹ Brown, 5-6.

¹⁰ Within its lottery system, the state of Georgia did include laws that allowed the Cherokee to make claims to their land against lottery winners, but the law was so convoluted and difficult to understand the Cherokee were unable to successfully protect their land. See Perdue, 95-96.

¹¹ The "Long Walk" of the Navajo is another example of forced removal. "References and Recommended Resources" for more information on the "Long Walk."

from their land. States, such as Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee, passed legislation to delegitimize the sovereignty of tribal nations and deny them the benefits and protections of a state citizen. Native peoples were not allowed to participate in the state government and could not be a witness in a court of law. This last measure essentially legalized theft of the Native peoples by white Americans as the Native peoples could not testify against those who stole from them. White Americans could go so far as to walk into the home of a Native person, take something of value and leave with no recourse to the Native person.

Of course, the “permanent Indian frontier” that President Jackson touted in 1829 did not hold for long, as white settlers continued to press westward. West of the Mississippi the government continued to make and break treaties with Native tribes. Treaty negotiations were often dubious. The government sometimes negotiated with tribal members who did not have authority or authorization to represent their tribes, and who, on occasion, were subsequently killed by their own tribe in retribution. US officials

“*The army simply began to round up Creek people, dragging them from their homes, and put them on the road...overland and by riverboat, freezing, starving, and drowning, about fifteen thousand people were ‘drove off like dogs’ to the West.*”¹³

also capitalized on intratribal factionalism among tribal chiefs who did not agree among themselves on the best course of action. Perhaps the most infamous broken treaty is the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which designated the entire western half of what is today South Dakota and part Nebraska as the Great Sioux Reservation, and acknowledged large swathes of Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana, and North Dakota as unceded territory. Any change to the treaty stipulations required a signatory majority of three-fourths of all Lakota men. Upon the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, however, and after failed negotiations to acquire the territory,¹² the US government determined to take it by force, contriving reasons to instigate a war with the Lakota (also known as the Sioux). In the course of the war for the Black Hills, Sioux warriors delivered the US army a crushing defeat at the Battle of the Greasy Grass in 1876 (also called the Battle of Little Bighorn). This, however, was not enough to deter the federal government, which assumed military occupation of all the reservations in Lakota country and passed legislation requiring the tribe to give up all claims to the Black Hills. To this day, the Lakota people refuse to recognize the US claim to the Black Hills as anything other than land theft. In fact, the US Supreme Court agreed, and in the 1980 case, the United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, ruled that the federal government had illegally seized the Black Hills and ordered the government to remunerate the tribe in the amount of \$106 million dollars. The Lakota Nation refuses to accept this payment, which, with interest now tops 1 billion dollars.

¹² Government negotiators offered the Lakota only \$6,000,000 for the Black Hills, though annual mining profits topped \$8,000,000. See Brown, 273-313 for a detailed account of the War for the Black Hills.

¹³ Perdue, 94.

Elimination

Elimination did not necessarily mean physical death; it also meant cultural and psychological death--the total destruction of a way of life. The two primary means by which the federal government sought to eliminate the "Indian problem" were assimilation and land divestment, which constituted death by other

means. However, alongside cultural elimination, and intersecting with it, elimination also included the physical deaths of millions of Native peoples. Some forms of elimination were indirect such as disease, malnutrition, and the decimation of food supplies. Others were direct, such as massacres.

DESTRUCTION OF THE BUFFALO: In the mid-19th century somewhere between 30-60 million buffalo roamed freely across the western plains. By the end of the 19th-century there were approximately 300 buffalo remaining. The destruction of the North American Bison (known commonly as buffalo) to near extinction was the result of several factors, including the construction of the Northern Pacific Railway, which cut through migration routes, the commercial sale of buffalo hides, and a concerted effort on the part of the US government to coerce remaining bands of Native tribes to move to reservations.

Although there is still some debate among scholars as to the American frontier army's official military policy regarding the destruction of the buffalo, there seems to be sufficient evidence to, at the least, recognize the army's overarching participation and complicity in the decimation of the buffalo. As the army saw it, Native American tribes were not staying on the government assigned reservations. One way to compel Native peoples, such as the Sioux, the Crow, and the Cheyenne, to comply with government policy (i.e. remain within the boundaries of the reservation), was to destroy their traditional food source. The frontier army was far more successful in attacking and killing the buffalo herds than they were in direct combat with the Native Americans, who maneuvered more quickly and widely spread than the army. The army led groups on party hunting trips, providing guns, ammunition, and protection as they hunted great numbers of buffalo for sport, usually keeping only the tongue and sometimes humps for food and leaving the carcass to rot. A group of businessmen visiting Fort McPherson were escorted by the Fifth Cavalry on a hunting party that killed over six hundred buffalo.¹⁴ Army officers were known to have contests between them to see who could kill the most buffalo. Furthermore, the army killed, using guns and even cannons, hundreds of buffalo that came near the forts built along traditional buffalo trails. There were some that were opposed to the slaughter of the buffalo. They saw this tactic as wasteful, a means of provoking hostility with the Native tribes, and a poor reflection on the abilities of the army who they believed could easily "pacify" Native peoples.

“*With my calvary and carbined artillery encamped in front, I wanted no other occupation in life than to ward off the savage and kill off his food until there should no longer be an Indian frontier in our beautiful country.*”¹⁵

—LTJ. JOHN M. SCHOFIELD

¹⁴ David D. Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 315.

¹⁵ John M. Schofield, *Forty-Six Years in the Army* (New York: The Century Co., 1897), 428.

In 1871, a Pennsylvania tannery created a method of converting the buffalo hide into commercial leather, which led to a widespread hunt of buffalo by the hide hunters. The destruction of the buffalo by hide hunters was further expanded with the construction of the railroad lines. The Northern Pacific line reached the Dakota-Montana border in 1880 and conveyed thousands of hides across the country to St. Louis. As the hide hunters destroyed the buffalo population they ventured onto lands that were protected by treaties for hunting only by Native tribes. The US government once again failed to adhere to agreements. They did not protect the buffalo and the lands from the aggressive hunting of the white Americans, allowing and even supporting the hunters in their economic pursuit.

While soldiers did use some buffalo meat for food and hide for clothing and shoes, the total devastation of the buffalo, full or almost full carcasses left to rot, and the cavalier writings left behind about the importance of destroying the food source of the Native Americans leaves little doubt about the motivations of many of the ranking officials in the US government. General Nelson A. Miles recalled the elimination of the buffalo:

“
*"This might seem like cruelty and wasteful extravagance but the buffalo, like the Indian, stood in the way of civilization and in the path of progress, and the decree had gone forth that they must both give way...The same territory which a quarter of a century ago was supporting those vast herds of wild game, is now covered with domestic animals which afford the food supply for hundreds of millions of people in civilized countries."*¹⁶

—GENERAL NELSON A. MILES

For Native peoples, such as the Kiowa, Cheyenne, Crow, and Lakota, the destruction of the buffalo was the decisive blow to their way of life. The Crow Chief, Plenty Coups describes it in terms of death: “When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened.”¹⁷

MASSACRES: Native peoples and whites frequently clashed, and both inflicted terrible acts of violence upon one another. Native tribes understood their actions as protecting their land, while the US Army saw its role as protecting white settlers. However, if one steps back for a moment from assigning personal guilt and assessing the individual moral implications of such killing, one sees that at the systemic level, massacres of Native peoples fit into an overall program of elimination. Throughout the second half of the 19th century, the US Army massacred hundreds of Indians, mostly women, children, and the elderly. Among the most famous are the Sand Creek Massacre and the Wounded Knee Massacre. In 1864, Colonel John Chivington and his regiment of 700 men killed and mutilated nearly 150 unarmed members of the Cheyenne and

¹⁶ Nelson A. Miles, *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles* (Chicago: Werner Co., 1987), 135.

¹⁷ Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2006), 2.

Arapaho tribes at Sand Creek. Nearly all those killed were women and children. Twenty-six years later, on December 29, 1890, the US Army's Seventh Cavalry massacred somewhere between 150-200 Sioux, many of them women and children, though some estimates range as high as 300. The dead were buried in a mass grave, and President Benjamin Harrison later awarded 20 members of the Seventh Cavalry the Medal of Honor. Though there is some dispute about how the shooting began, Lakota Holy Man, Black Elk later recalled:

“When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there.”¹⁸

The Impact of Native American Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination

It is difficult to say how many Native Americans died during the 19th century in the continental United States, but we do know that populations declined precipitously. Some estimates suggest there were anywhere between 5 million and 15 million Native people at the outset of the 19th century. By its close, there were little over 200,000. Most people died from disease, but many deaths were the result of more systematic efforts to solve the “Indian problem.”

Today, many Native peoples suffer the effects of historical and cultural trauma. Many, though not all reservations, have high rates of poverty, unemployment, and alcoholism. There is also widespread violence against women. According to the

Indian Law Resource Center, 4 in 5 Native women have experienced violence, and according to the Department of Justice, on some reservations Native women are 10 times as likely to be murdered as non-native women. In addition, infant mortality rates are nearly double that of non-native populations.

Alongside these bleak realities, however, many Native tribes have begun to reclaim their cultural heritage, including preserving their language, which for some had been on the brink of extinction. Native peoples also continue to advocate for land and sovereignty rights, and for environmental protections, such as access to safe water and the preservation of sacred sites.

¹⁸ Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (Albany: SUNY, 2008 [1931]), 219.

Intersection of Native American Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination with Human Dignity

At best, government policies toward Native Americans demonstrate the near-universal 19th century view that Native American culture and values were “uncivilized,” and therefore inferior to Euro-American culture and values; thus, Native Americans needed to be “civilized,” or assimilated. To say that Euro-Americans and Native peoples did not understand one another is an understatement. Federal and state policies reflect this lack of recognition and the naive view that a person’s culture and way of life could simply be erased and replaced with a foreign culture and its values. In fact, culture and values are an expression of one’s community, membership within that community, and intrinsically tied to one’s very sense of self. Assimilative policies left many Native tribes bereft of the cultural concepts to make sense of the world, going as far as changing people’s very names. The US government’s policies and practices prioritized political power and economic growth over fidelity to treaties, the rule of law, and the value of people’s lives and flourishing. Many of the actions undertaken by the government, army, and individuals completely disregarded the humanity of Native peoples, and because they were seen as an obstacle to expansion, they were treated as expendable, if they could not or would not adapt to Euro-American values. ❖

Timeline

- **8th-15th Century:** Leif Ericson and other Norse peoples, possibly some Asian groups, make contact with indigineous peoples in what today is known as North and South America.
- **15th-to Early 19th Century:** The French, Spanish, English, Portegese, Dutch colonize the continent; many indigenious groups are wiped out from disease or pressed into slavery; missionaries, such as Jesuit priests, evangelize indigenous peoples; there is extensive trade between Native peoples and Eurpean traders.
- **19th century:** The rise of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny; programs of removal, assimilation, and elimination begin or intensify.
- **1831-1877:** Trail of Tears
- **1848:** Gold Rush begins, intensifying westward expansion through Indian Country
- **1864:** Navajo Long Walk
- **1868:** Fort Laramie Treaty
- **1876:** US Army suffers its worst defeat against Native American in the Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Bighorn.
- **1879:** The first federally run native boarding school, Carlisle Indian School, opens.
- **1887:** The Dawes Act is passed, separating tribal reservations into individual allotments to remove native people from their tribes. Native people who accepted allotments were granted citizenship.
- **1890:** Massacre at Wounded Knee, when over 150 Lakota people, many unarmed women, children, and elders, were killed.
- **1930s:** The Livestock Reduction Program decimates the Navajo livestock supply and economic livelihood.
- **1956:** The Indian Relocation Act is passed, encouraging native peoples to leave their reservations and traditional lands and assimilate into urban populations.
- **1973:** Wounded Knee Occupation, when the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied the 1890 massacre site for 71 days.
- **1978:** American Indian Religious Freedom Act passed, giving Native peoples the legal right to practice traditional rituals and ceremonies.

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