

# Unit 9: *Conquest of the Plains*

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## Lecture 9.1 • *Tribes of the Great Plains*

### ***Background***

- By 1860, nearly all of the Indians east of the Mississippi River, and along the west coast, had been relocated, assimilated, subjugated or exterminated.
- On the Great Plains and in the Rockies however, as many as 150,000 Indians still lived as they had for thousands of years.
- The largest tribes in the West were the **Arapaho, Kiowas, Cheyennes, Crows, Lakota Sioux, Utes, and Comanches.**



**What’s the difference between a “bison” and a “buffalo”.**

### ***Indian Culture***

- Over the centuries, Indian cultures became tied to the rhythms and cycles of nature. The natural world was something to be revered and worshiped, not conquered and subdued.
- The Plains Indians had acquired the horse from Spanish explorers in the 1600s, and with it they became lords of the buffalo.
- It is impossible to overstate the importance of the buffalo to the Plains Indians. The entire existence of the Plains Indians was tied directly to the existence of the buffalo ... they were inseparable.

### **Personal Reflection:**

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### ***The Calm Before the Storm***

- Most of the Indians had gotten along fine with the white trappers and traders that came west in the 1820s and ‘30s.
- Even during the era of the wagon trains, most of the plains Indians were happy to trade with the pioneers.
- It’s important to remember though that none of these white were stopping on the plains.
- But even during these years of relative peace, most people — white and Indians alike — there was still a profound difference between “us” and “them”.

## Lecture 9.2 • *The “Indian Problem”*

### *First Signs of Trouble*

- Conflict between the Indians and white Americans began to rise during the 1840s and ‘50s as white settlers and miners began moving west.
- The conflict was constant during this early period, but it was small scale, with “only” 360 pioneers and 420 Indians having been killed in two decades.

### *Hopes for Peace*

- In 1851, the Laramie Treaty was signed between the U.S. government and the Plains Tribes. In exchange for food, trade goods, money, and legal title to their land, many of the tribes agreed to settle in one place, and give up their old way of life.
- During the 1850s, as **gold** was discovered across the West, more and more whites began to trespass on Indian land. Without the government there to stop them, prospectors and settlers routinely violated the Laramie Treaty.
- So, the government had a difficult choice to make: either support the Indians because it had signed treaties with them, or support the white settlers and miners because they were white, and they were voters.

### *The Path to War*

- Fairly quickly, the lack of cultural understanding on the part of both the whites and the Indians led to mistrust and fear of the “other”.
- As fear took hold of both groups, they started seeing each other as stereotypes, and not as their true selves...  
The Indians became “redskins” ... and the Americans became the greedy “pale-faces”.
- Western newspapers fueled the fear, and dehumanized the Indians by printing wild accounts of attacks by the “painted savages”.  
Fear of course, led to **hatred**.
- And unfortunately, it was only a matter of time before that hatred would explode into widespread violence and open warfare.



**Sports  
tradition?  
Or racial  
insensitivity?**

#### Personal Reflection:

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## Lecture 9.3 • “Let Them Eat Grass.”

### *Background*

- The first signs of conflict with the tribes of the Great Plains came in the new state of Minnesota, where thousands of white farmers had settled between 1858 and 1861.
- As more and more white settlers arrived, the Dakota, or Santee Sioux nation, agreed to settle on a reservation in exchange for money and assistance from the government.
- Despite the treaty though, white farmers continued to claim land on the Indian reservation. The **annuities** and supplies promised to the Indians were also routinely late, or flat out stolen from them by white Indian agents.

### *Uprising*

- By 1862, starvation was rampant all across the Santee reservation.
- When alerted to the fact that the Indians were starving, the local Indian agent, Andrew Myrick, was quoted as saying, “Let them eat grass.”
- In August of 1862, hundreds of Santee rose up, and attacked white settlements in search of food.
- Military reinforcements soon arrived in the area, but 600 white settlers — including Andrew Myrick — had already been killed.

### *Surrender*

- Faced with fighting the U.S. Army, the Dakota surrendered. Thousands of them were imprisoned, and hundreds were found guilty of murder by military tribunals, and sentenced to death.
- 224 of the sentences were commuted, or lessened, by President Lincoln.
- However, 38 of the Dakota were hanged to death in the largest mass execution in the nation’s history.
- In 1863, all 1,600 remaining Dakota were expelled from Minnesota, and “relocated” to Nebraska. The treaty was voided, while the reservation was dissolved and opened to white settlement.



**What state’s name comes from the Dakota words for “cloudy water”?**

### **Personal Reflection:**

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**annuity:**  
a sum of money paid to someone every year

## Lecture 9.4 • *Month of the Freezing Moon*

### *Colorado: 1864*

- From 1862 to '64, Indian raids cut off Colorado Territory from the East. Coloradans pleaded with President Lincoln to send troops, but none could be spared due to the Civil War.
- So, in the summer of 1864, Governor John Evans authorized the creation of a 100-day Indian-fighting *militia*. Command of the Colorado 3rd Regiment was given to **Colonel John Chivington**.

### *Sand Creek Massacre*

- On November 29th of that same year, the 700 men of the 3rd attacked a camp of 550 Cheyenne & Arapahoe Indians at Sand Creek.
- The civilian militia quickly lost control, killing Indians indiscriminately and mutilating many of the Indians for trophies. Some soldiers refused to attack the camp.

### *After Sand Creek*

- The attack at Sand Creek united the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota, who launched a rare winter war campaign which swept across the plains.
- But some people still fought for a peaceful resolution to the trouble. Most notable were Maj. Edward Wynkoop, Lt. Silas Soule, and Chief Black Kettle.
- By 1866 however, the moderates were shut out. Wynkoop was reassigned to a remote outpost, Black Kettle was losing power to the Cheyenne war chiefs, and Silas Soule was assassinated in Denver.

### *Battle of the Washita*

- With the Civil War over, a whole new group of officers headed west to deal with the Indians. One of these officers was the dashing and arrogant **George Armstrong Custer**.
- In November of 1868, Custer's 7th Cavalry attacked the last large camp of Cheyenne near the Washita River in western Oklahoma.
- Washita marked the end of Indian resistance on the Southern Plains. Most of the Cheyenne moved onto reservations, while some of the warriors moved north to join the Lakota Sioux.



**Who is this?**

### **Personal Reflection:**

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## Lecture 9.5 • *The Great Sioux War*

### **1868**

- Four years after Sand Creek, another big treaty was signed, and many plains tribes agreed to abandon the buffalo hunt, relocate to reservations, and take up farming.
- As part of the Treaty of 1868, chief Red Cloud convinced the government to leave the sacred Black Hills region to the Lakota.
- But even as peace once again descended on the plains, forces were in motion which would destroy that peace ...

### ***The Rising Tide***

- In 1869, the transcontinental railroad was completed.
- In the early 1870s, white hunters and businessmen began the whole sale slaughter of the bison. Millions are killed.
- In 1874, Gold was discovered in the Black Hills of the Dakotas. Thousands of miners stream onto land that was promised to the Lakota in 1868.
- Not surprisingly, as white settlers continued to ignore reservation boundaries and occupy Indian land, the tribes responded with renewed warfare.

### ***The Last Battle***

- In 1876 Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse led the Lakota off the reservations and back onto the plains.
- George Custer and the 7th Cavalry were ordered to forcibly return the Sioux to their reservation.
- They clashed at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and Custer’s command was completely wiped out.
- But what appeared as a great Indian victory would also spell the end of any interest on the part of whites to find a peaceful solution to the “Indian problem.”



**There are two of these hot dog restaurants in Colorado. Where?**

### **Personal Reflection:**

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