

Lesson 24: Tensions in the West

How did settlers change the West and affect American Indians?

Lesson 24 – Section 7: War on the Plains

- The flow of miners, ranchers, and farmers to the West led to a change in federal policy toward American Indians.
- Under the Indian Removal Act of 1830, American Indians had been promised lands in the Great Plains in exchange for giving up their homelands in the East.
- By the mid-1800s, however, whites were pushing deep into this “Indian Territory.”



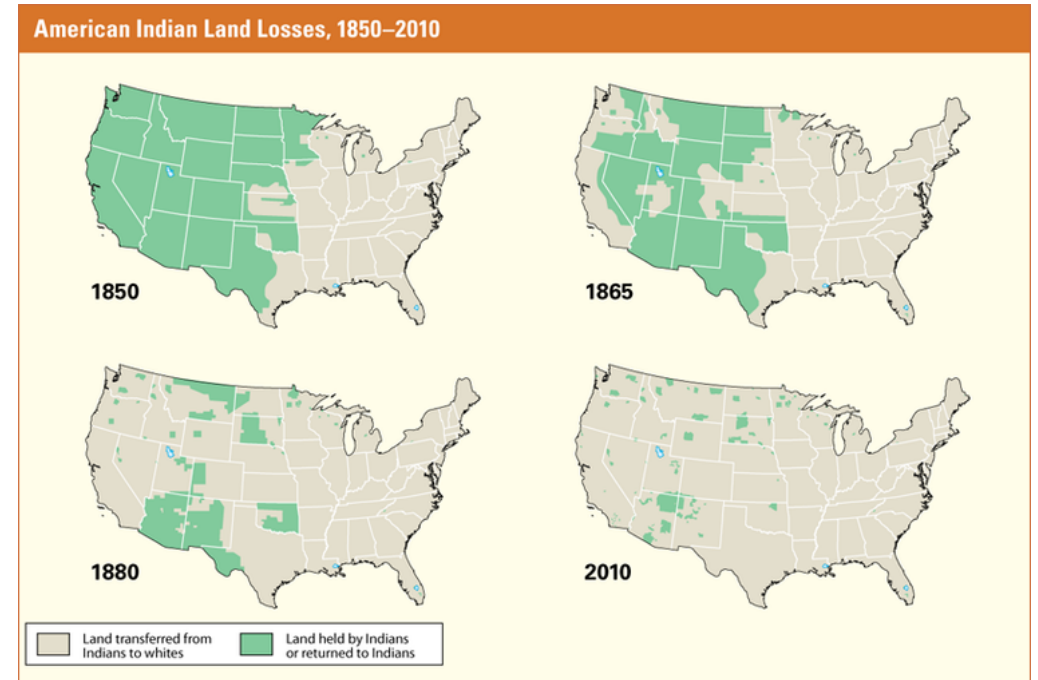
Lesson 24 – Section 7: War on the Plains

- In 1867, Congress tried to separate American Indians and settlers by moving the Indians onto reservations.
- In exchange for their land, American Indians were promised food, farm tools, and schools where their children would learn to “live like whites.”



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- the bison disappeared, and most Plains Indians had little choice but to move to reservations.
- Once they did, however, the promised food often failed to arrive because dishonest whites, working as federal agents, refused to give the tribe food until they cooperated with the agency's demands.
- If it did arrive, often the food was spoiled by the time it reached the American Indians.



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- The most famous battle in this long struggle was fought near the Little Big Horn River in present-day Montana.
- The Battle of the Little Big Horn soon came to be known by another name: “Custer's Last Stand.”



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- The conflict began when soldiers led by a former Civil War officer named George Custer found gold in the Black Hills of Dakota Territory.
- Within months, 15,000 gold-hungry whites were swarming over Sioux land. Rather than remove the miners, the government demanded that the Sioux sell the Black Hills, but the Sioux refused.



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- The army was ordered to force the American Indians out. In June 1876, army scouts reported that about 800 Sioux and Cheyenne were camped beside the Little Big Horn River.
- Custer was ordered to locate the camp and then wait for reinforcements.



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- However, once Custer spotted the Indian camp of several thousand warriors, he decided to attack at once, leading to a disastrous battle. Custer split up his troops, and the group that he led suddenly found itself surrounded by angry warriors.
- The battle, one warrior said, lasted no longer than a hungry man needs to eat his lunch. In those few minutes, Custer and all his men—about 200 soldiers—were killed.



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- Angry whites called the battle a massacre and over the next few months, the army tracked down the Sioux and Cheyenne and forced them onto reservations.
- Ignoring earlier treaties, Congress took the Black Hills and over 20 million acres of land away from the Sioux.

