

Summary: Conflicts on the Plains

War on the Plains

In the 1840s, settlers moved west to the Great Plains. They were looking for land and gold. The government built roads and railroads for the settlers. Many Indians lived on the Great Plains. The government tried to get them to sell their land. The government wanted the Indians to move to reservations.

The Plains Indians did not want to live and farm on the reservations. The reservations were small. The land was poor. Most of the Indians were not farmers. They were hunters. For years millions of buffalo lived on the Great Plains. The Indians hunted them for their meat and fur. The settlers killed many buffalo. New railroads, roads, and settlements hurt the buffalo habitat. By 1889, the buffalo were nearly extinct.

U.S. soldiers tried to make the Plains Indians give up their land. The Indians fought against the soldiers. Some famous battles were the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Battle of Wounded Knee, and the Sand Creek Massacre. Finally the Indians were defeated and forced to move to the reservations.

Government Policy

Government officials wanted to make the Indians live like white settlers. Lawmakers wanted the Indians to assimilate. They tried to force the Indians to give up their culture and traditions. Indians were not allowed to have religious ceremonies. Indian children had to go to special schools. They were not allowed to speak Indian languages. They could not wear Indian clothing.

The government wanted the Indians to become farmers. In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act. This law broke reservation land into small pieces. The government gave some pieces to Indians who promised to farm them. It sold the rest of the land to settlers.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

reservation *noun*, land the government reserved for Indians

habitat *noun*, the area where an animal or plant normally lives or grows

extinct *adjective*, when a certain type of plant or animal no longer exists

assimilate *verb*, to change a group's culture and traditions so that it blends with a larger group.



After You Read

REVIEW Why did Plains Indians need large areas of land? Circle reasons why Indians did not want to live on reservations.

REVIEW Why did the buffalo herds shrink? Highlight the sentence that tells how settlers changed the habitat.

REVIEW What did the Dawes Act do to reservation land? Circle the sentence that tells what happened to reservation land.