

The Indian Wars

Prior to the end of the Civil War, Congress passed three acts that were planned to encourage growth of the Great Plains and other western regions.

- The **Pacific Railway Act** authorized the **transcontinental railroad** financed with public land grants and cash loans
- The **Homestead Act** allowed for settlement of western lands
- The **Morrill Land Grant Act** gave public lands to states and territories to fund agriculture, mechanical arts, and military science colleges.

This westward expansion created many problems for the Native Americans. Most now lived west of the Mississippi River. They were now being pushed aside due to the California Gold Rush of 1849, white people moving onto their lands, the building of the transcontinental railroad, and the development of farms in the fertile Great Plains region.

The Native Americans had no choice but to fight back. During the 1850's to 1890, a series of wars raged in the west. The federal troops were often too strong and technologically advanced for them and the Native Americans were forced to sign treaties that removed them to smaller areas known as **reservations**. Many of the Native American tribes did not join forces with each other so as there was no unification, they were easily defeated.

The defeat of the Sioux at Wounded Knee in South Dakota in 1890 is considered the end of the Indian Wars.

The Sioux Wars

1865	The federal government decides to build a road through Sioux territory. The Sioux warriors resist violently resulting in Red Cloud's War
1867	Red Cloud's War ends and the Sioux agree to live on a reservation in Dakota Territory
1875	The federal government allows miners to search for gold on the Sioux reservation. The Second Sioux War begins and Chief Sitting Bull leads many of his people off the reservation
1876	At the Battle of Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull's warriors defeated the army of General George Custer. It would be known as Custer's Last Stand. In response the federal government sends more troops and force the Sioux to move to reservations.
1890	At the Massacre of Wounded Knee, American soldiers open fire on unarmed Sioux people, killing 200



Custer's Last Stand



Sitting Bull

Despite their victory in the Indian Wars, the federal government continued to show little or no respect for Native American values and cultures. They were given reservation lands that were inhabitable and of poor agricultural quality.

The **Dawes Act of 1887** aimed at “**Americanizing**” Native Americans. It proposed the breakup of tribes and reservations and only granted land directly to Native Americans as individuals or families. Those who abandoned their tribes were now eligible for land deeds and U.S. Citizenship, however very few Native Americans took up the government on this offer. By 1900 the federal policies had greatly reduced the size of the Native American population and had also made them among the poorest Americans.

Another effort to “Americanize” the Native Americans was to send their children to special boarding schools that were nowhere near their homelands. The most famous was the **Carlisle Indian School** in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The children were forced to dress as Americans under forced assimilation. They had to give up their tribal customs and adapt to white American ways.



Native American children at the Carlisle Indian School