American West Part 5 – Conflict and Tension

1. Tensions between settlers and Plains Indians

White fear of Plains Indians	*Plains Indians fear of whites*
• Whites did not understand tribe raiding in Native American culture; • Racist views about Native Americans; • Anger about competition for horses and cows, which Plains Indians sometimes stole; • Fear of Indians led to whites building forts to keep watch.	• Mistrust of whites as their customs were very different; • White migrants seriously disrupted buffalo hunting thanks to the trails they set up; • White settlers hunted in large numbers, unlike the careful way in which Indians had managed the buffalo herds; • Oxen to pull settlers' wagons led to shortages of grass on the Plains.

2. The Fort Laramie Treaty (1851)

What was it?	*What led to it?*
An agreement the US government believed would end mistrust between whites and Plains Indians by 'mutual compromise'.	Pressure on food supplies → conflict among tribes → white fears of attacks → demands to US government to provide protection

What were the terms of the treaty?		*What were the consequences?*
Indians would: • End fighting between tribes; • Allow white settlers, railroad surveyors and military posts on their land; • Pay a sum if treaty is broken.	**Government would:** • Protect Plains Indians from white Americans; • Give them specific land 'for all time'; • Pay $50,000 yearly to the tribes if they kept to these terms.	• Territories set out for Plains Indians led to **reservations;** • White settlers allowed into Indians Territories led to **more white settlement on the Great Plains;** • More railroad surveyors and military posts in Indian Territories **also increased white settlement;** • Tribes receiving money from the US Government led to **loss of Indian independence**, as they had never had any need for money before.

3. Indian Wars

1 Little Crow's War, 1862

Little Crow, a chief of the Santee Sioux Indians, lived on their reservation in Minnesota. In 1861, crops failed and food promised by the government didn't arrive – they faced starvation. In August 1862, Little Crow and others attacked the agency that ran the reservation. They stole food to share, then burned the agency buildings. They also killed several US soldiers. By October, most Santee had surrendered or been captured. They were then moved to a smaller reservation, Crow Creek. Its barren landscape caused many deaths that winter.

2 The Sand Creek Massacre, 1864

The Cheyenne on the Sand Creek reservation were starving after crop failures. Led by their chief, Black Kettle, they attacked wagon trains and stole food but didn't harm travellers. After three years of attacks, Black Kettle negotiated with government officials and the army. On 29 November 1864, Colonel Chivington led a dawn raid on their camp. More than 150 Indians were massacred even though they waved white flags. Some, including Black Kettle, escaped and told other tribes what had happened. A US Senate Committee of Enquiry condemned Chivington. Both white men and Indians were horrified.

3 Red Cloud's War, 1865–68

Red Cloud

Miner John Bozeman established the Bozeman Trail, connecting the Oregon Trail to gold in Montana. Bozeman's trail broke the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 because it crossed the hunting grounds of the Sioux. Red Cloud (a chief of the Lakota Sioux) led attacks on the trail travellers. In 1866, the government talked with him but he stormed out when he learned that two more forts were planned along the trail. In December 1866, Captain William Fetterman and 80 soldiers rode into a trap and were massacred by the Sioux, who blocked the route so no traveller could use it. The US army then negotiated a second Fort Laramie Treaty.

4. Battle of Little Big Horn (1876)

Causes:
- Fort Laramie Treaty broken by **General George Cluster**, who let settlers claim Sioux lands.
- US Government wanted mineral rights over Black Hills which the Sioux refused as the mountains were sacred. They were given 60 days to leave or be attacked.
- It was winter, they could not leave & were attacked.

The battle:
- The Sioux organised and prepared for battle while the US army planned an attack to force them back into reservations.
- General Custer only had 600 cavalrymen. Sioux warriors led by war leaders **Sitting Bull** and **Crazy Horse** easily defeated them.
- Custer and all his men were killed and scalped.

Consequences:
- Short-term: failure and humiliation for US government
- Long-term: success for US government, as Indian resistance ended here. The government decided that Indians must live on reservations, all treaties were cancelled, and the US would have military control over the Indians.

5. The Dawes Act (1887)

Law which allowed US government to break up Native American reservations into smaller allotments, which Natives had to accept if they wanted to become naturalised American citizens.

Aims:
- Create responsible farmers in the white man's image – making Indians more 'white'
- End reservations by turning Indians to farmers
- Break up tribal power
- Give families 160 acres of tribal land
- Each individual would receive 80 for 25 years – after, they would receive US citizenship and get to keep their land

Consequences:
- Failure to improve conditions for Indians
- Plains Indian life deteriorated
- Tribe structures weakened
- Many Indians who had roamed the Great Plains freely now could not do so anymore and did not adapt to farming lifestyle
- Life on reservations was marked by filth, disease and poverty
- Any 'surplus' land would be given to whites.

6. Wounded Knee Massacre

Indians were reacting to their bad situation with the ritual of the **Ghost Dance.**

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US Army ordered to stop the dance. **Sitting Bull** was arrested, shot and killed in 1890.

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Others fled, but were slowed down by snow and so the army took them to Wounded Knee Creek

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Indians started the Ghost Dance then, the army responded by opening fire against them.

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Within 10 minutes, 250 Indians were killed.

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It was the last clash between the Sioux and the US army. End of indigenous resistance.