

The Indian Wars

From the very beginning of colonialization in North America in the early 1600s, so-called “American-Indian Wars” were fought between settlers and various tribes. Alliances between tribes and even between tribes and colonial powers shifted continually. Naturally there were casualties on both sides, but most historians agree that in the end it was the Native Americans who suffered the greatest whether by death, disease or loss of land, culture, identity and ultimately what they knew as home.

In the year 1918, a mere 100 years ago, there was a battle fought in Bear Valley, Arizona, between Yaqui Indians and the United States Army 10th Cavalry Regiment. At the time, it was regarded as just another minor skirmish with a group of aggressive Indians. In retrospect, it became a major milestone because it went down in the history books as one of the last of its kind, the last battle of the Indian Wars.



Custer's last stand at the Battle of Big Horn

A Historical terms and events you should know about

Read these short texts and match them with the correct term or event. Research and write two more short summaries for the last two terms.

Custer's Last Stand	Ghost Dance	Trail of Tears	Wounded Knee Massacre
<p>1. _____</p> <p>The discovery of gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1875 seemed reason enough for the US government to ignore earlier treaties guaranteeing the Sioux Indians their land and to invade the region. In defiance of US orders, 10,000+ Native Americans of the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes led by the chiefs Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse gathered in Montana. The general leading the US troops made a fatal choice when he decided to continue ahead to where the tribes had camped and not wait for reinforcements. The unavoidable battle ensued at the Little Bighorn River. In less than an hour, the 3,000 Native American warriors had defeated the US battalion, killing almost 300 including the general. Unfortunately, immediately after the battle and for a long time to come, the Battle of the Little Bighorn was used to portray Indians as uncivilized and bloodthirsty, whereas the soldiers were celebrated as heroes.</p>			
			<p>2. _____</p> <p>On December 29, 1890, a group of Lakota Sioux Native Americans celebrating tribal rituals was surrounded by the US Army's 7th Cavalry. The gathering made the soldiers suspicious and they demanded that the Indians relinquish their weapons. At some point a scuffle between a soldier and a Lakota ensued and a shot was fired. Because tensions were already running high, this single shot was enough to cause pandemonium. Both sides started shooting at close range and within an hour the “battle” was over. In the end, an estimated 150 Indians were killed although some historians say it could have been as many as 300. Included in these numbers were at least 60 women and children who had also been attending the ritual ceremonies. The US Army suffered around 30 dead. This unnecessary tragedy, this bloodbath was the last major conflict between the United States and the Plains Indians.</p>

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3. _____
Since the arrival of the “White Man”, Native Americans have suffered greatly. By the late 1880s many Native Americans had already been confined to reservations where conditions were far from favorable. Many lives had already been lost and the Native Americans’ way of life changed radically. In January 1889, a Northern Paiute Indian had a dream in which all Native Americans were taken up into the sky while below them the Earth opened up to swallow all the Whites. The Earth was then returned to its natural state, including the return of the plentiful buffalo herds which would ensure the survival of the tribes. The Indians then peacefully descended back to Earth. In order to hasten this time of renewal and the demise of the White Man, the Indians were to gather every six weeks and perform a circular dance lasting five days and four nights, during which some of them would fall into a trance. These gatherings and the new movement made US officials very nervous.

4. _____
Despite the Native American tribes from the Southeast being considered “civilized” by the white European settlers, they were unwelcome in the region because the settlers wanted and needed the land for agriculture, for example for cotton fields. In 1830 Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, designating what would later become the state of Oklahoma as Indian Territory. The first “removal” took place in the winter of 1831 when the Choctaw tribe unwillingly embarked on foot. They were poorly equipped with no assistance or compensation from the US government for the journey. In 1838 the largest “removal” took place when more than 20,000 Cherokee were forced to leave. Thousands died along the way, either beforehand in internment camps or after their arrival in Oklahoma due to disease. Altogether an estimated 125,000 Native Americans were forced to leave their native lands and about 15,000 of them died during the resettlement.

5. Buffalo Soldiers

6. Crazy Horse Memorial


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B Questions on the texts

1. Explain the two names for this battle – Battle of the Little Bighorn and Custer’s Last Stand.
2. Why do you think General Custer didn’t wait for reinforcements?
3. Why is this confrontation usually not referred to as a “battle”?
4. Explain which term – prophet, messiah or savior – you would use to describe the initiator of the Ghost Dance and why?
5. Why did the Ghost Dance Movement make the US government nervous?
6. The text doesn’t say, but how do you think the settlers defined “civilized”?
7. How would you describe the purpose of the Indian Wars?
8. How do you imagine the Indian Wars were justified in American society at the time?

C Research, review and summarize

Divide into groups. Each group reads one of the following texts:

<http://www.cowboysindians.com/2018/01/the-last-battle-of-the-american-indian-wars/> 

<http://www.cowboysindians.com/2017/11/clever-warriors-horrible-violence/> 

Report back to the entire class.

D Analyze and interpret this quote

“Please note that Yaquis and other American Indians are living people with a present and a future as well as a past.” ((Source: http://www.native-languages.org/yaqui_culture.htm))

Explain this emphasis. How do you interpret this quote?

A Lösungen/Lösungsvorschläge

1. Custer's Last Stand
2. Wounded Knee Massacre
3. Ghost Dance
4. Trail of Tears
5. Buffalo Soldiers

Up until the 1950s the US Army was strictly segregated. Regiments of African-American soldiers, who mainly served on the Western frontier after the American Civil War, were given the nickname "Buffalo Soldiers" by the Native Americans. Some say this name was given based on appearance – curly, black hair – and others say it was based on their ferocity in battle. These soldiers were responsible for controlling the Indians on the Plains and participated in many battles. Other duties included protecting settlers, travelers and railroad workers and protecting national parks by fighting fires and poachers.

6. Crazy Horse Memorial

Crazy Horse Memorial is located in the Black Hills of South Dakota. It is a rock sculpture of the Lakota warrior Crazy Horse, who died in 1877. Chief Henry Standing Bear commissioned the Polish-American sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski to carve the image out of Thunderhead Mountain. Work commenced in 1948 but it is far from done. The face was completed in 1998. The memorial is meant as a symbol of Native American heroes and as a counterpart to nearby Mount Rushmore. The project is funded by entrance fees, proceeds from the visitor center and gift shop and from private donations. No government money has been accepted.

B Lösungen/Lösungsvorschläge

1. One name refers to the location of the battle and the other focuses on the General who led the battle. Using Custer's name is a way of commemorating him as a military hero.
2. I think he was convinced that his troops were stronger than the "uncivilized" Indians and was certain he would easily win.
3. The Indians were at a ritual gathering and not preparing for battle. The presence of women and children makes this obvious.
4. I would choose "prophet" because he is predicting what will happen in the future.
I would choose "messiah" because he is bringing a message to solve their problems.
I would choose "savior" because he is showing the tribes how they can save themselves.
5. It made them nervous because it was something new and unknown that they couldn't understand. They knew the Indians were angry and were afraid of what large, organized groups of them might do.
6. I think they defined it as being like them – being farmers, living in towns, being Christians, owning land and speaking English.
7. The purpose of the Indian Wars was not just to relocate or convert the Indians, but to destroy and annihilate them.
8. The Indians were seen as uncivilized and worth less than the white, European settlers. The settlers thought they deserved and were entitled to the land and gave no thought to the rights of the Native Americans.