

# 7 Two Worlds Collide — 1850–1887



FIGURE 7.1: Going to the Agency to Have a Big Talk, by White Bear (Northern Cheyenne), 1885

*Going to the Agency to  
have a "Big Talk."  
Drawn by "White Bear" a Cheyenne*



## READ TO FIND OUT:

- Why the government needed treaties with Indian tribes
- Two important results of the treaties
- Why conflicts erupted after the United States signed treaties with Indian tribes
- What strategies different tribes followed to survive

## The Big Picture

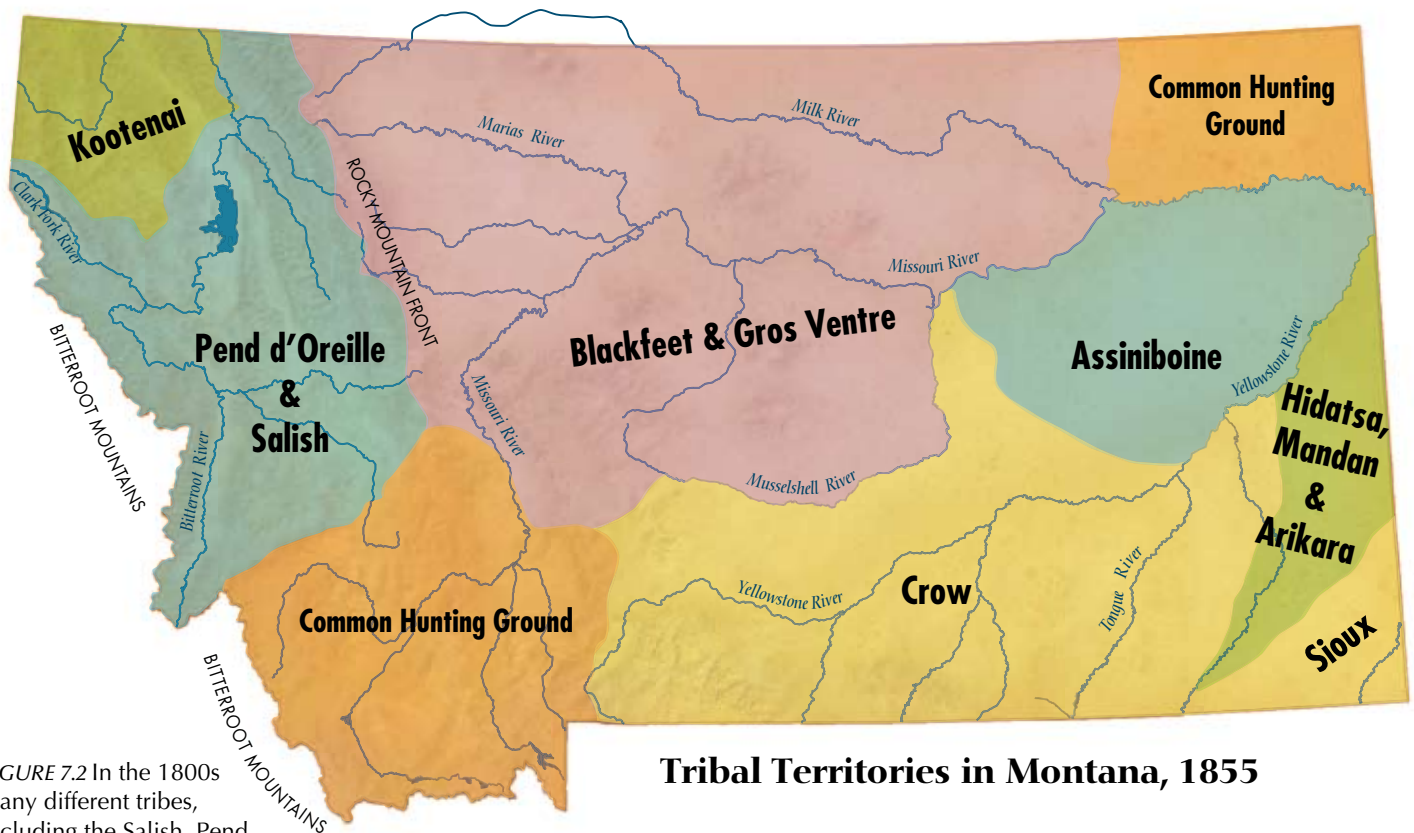
The settling of the West by non-Indians and the destruction of the great bison herds—the center of Plains life—changed human history here.

In the second half of the 1800s, a series of changes swept across Montana that profoundly transformed human history in this place.

The fur trade already had changed economic patterns, and disease had weakened many tribes. Into this shifting world came the settlers—first traveling through on their way west, and then coming to stay. These settlers brought foreign ideas about how to use the land, ideas that their government imposed on the Indian tribes.

Even more traumatically, the bison were nearly destroyed. The vast herds that had fed and supported Plains Indians for 10,000 years were killed off by the millions.

Picture all these forces gathering like a tornado. It tore across Montana during this time and changed human history in this place forever.



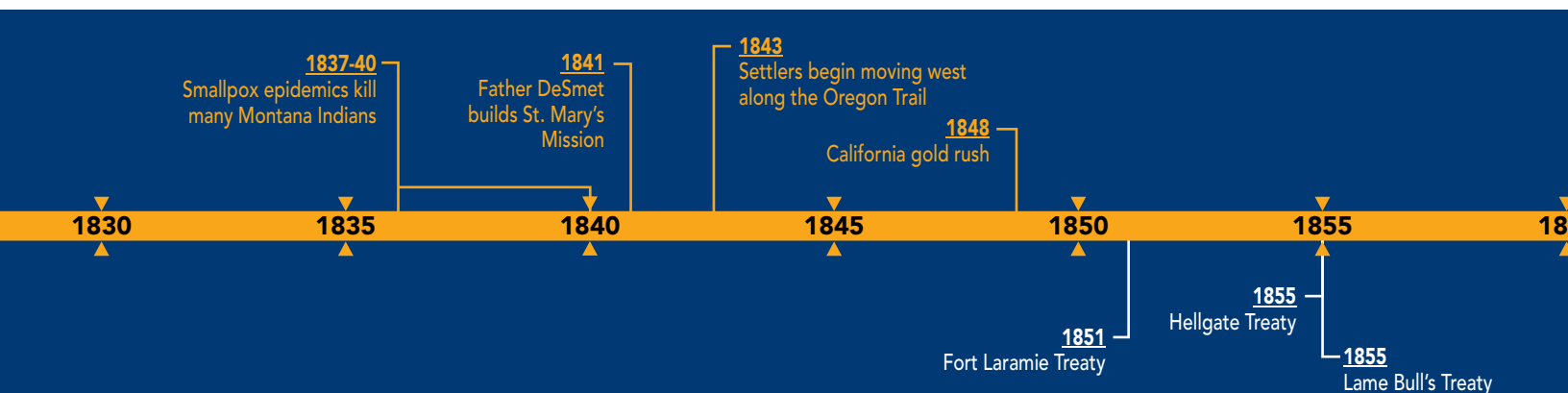
**Tribal Territories in Montana, 1855**

FIGURE 7.2 In the 1800s many different tribes, including the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, Kootenai, Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, Sioux, Arikara, Northern Cheyenne, Crow, Shoshone, and sometimes the Nez Perce, hunted and lived in what is now Montana. This map shows present-day Montana tribes' traditional territories as defined by treaties signed in the 1850s.

## Nations in Negotiation: Treaties That Changed Montana History

Long before **Euro-Americans** (Americans with European influence or ancestry) wanted to settle in the Plains region, they began working on better ways to get across it. In the 1850s the government began surveying routes for a **transcontinental** (all the way across the continent) railroad to connect the West Coast to the rest of the country. But to build railroads, the government had to get permission from the Indian tribes who controlled the land.

So the U.S. government negotiated a series of **treaties** (agreements between governments) with American Indian tribes across the West. These treaties are important for two main reasons. First, in establishing reservations, the government acknowledged that tribes were legal owners of their own lands. Second, the treaties recognized Indian tribes as **sovereign** (independent and self-governing) nations. No other ethnic group holds sovereignty over lands within the United States. The



treaties between the United States and the sovereign Indian nations form the basis for Indian law today.

The treaties of the 1850s all outlined similar agreements. They identified the traditional territories that each tribe controlled or lived in. This legally established tribal sovereignty in each area. This was the first step toward establishing Indian **reservations** (land that tribes reserved for their own use through treaties). The U.S. government did not give reservation lands to tribes; reservations are lands the tribes were able to keep for themselves. In many cases reservations are **remnants** (parts) of Indian tribes' traditional territories.

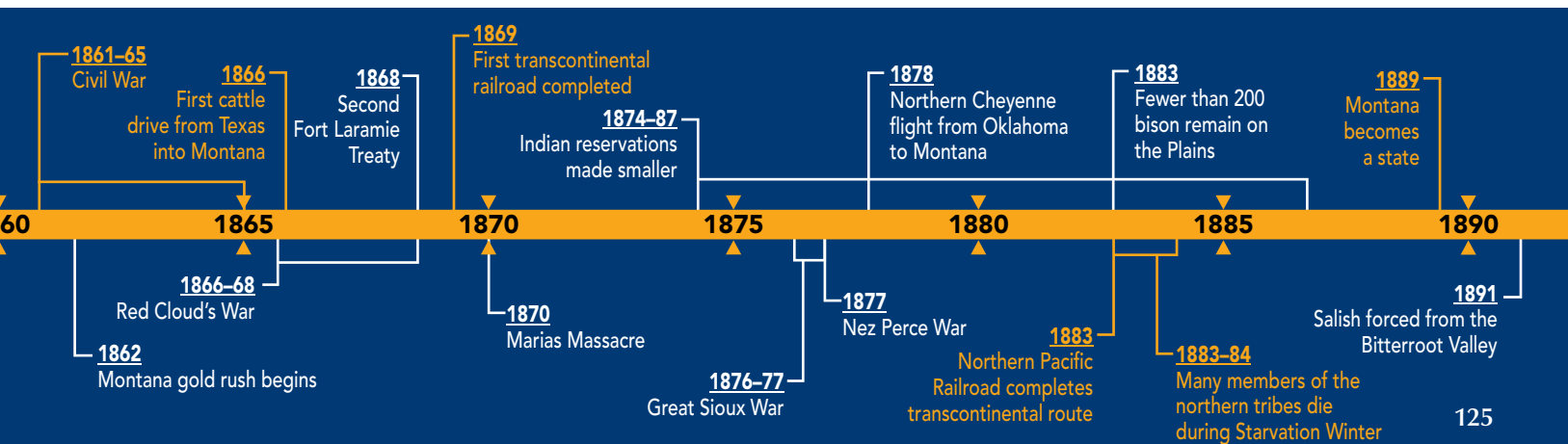
The treaties also gave the United States permission to build roads, railroads, and settlements on Indian land in exchange for **annuities** (annual payments in the form of food, equipment, supplies, and funds the U.S. government owed a tribe by treaty). Some of the treaties also pledged the Indian tribes to make peace with one another.

To negotiate the treaties, government representatives met with tribal leaders at gatherings called treaty councils. Each party at these councils had its own goals. The government wanted the Indian people to settle into villages, to become farmers, to convert to Christianity, and to live like Euro-Americans. This is called **assimilation** (when one culture is absorbed into the majority culture). The government also wanted the Indian tribes to **cede** (give up) vast regions of their land so that non-Indians could build farms, towns, and roads.

Each tribe had its own goals, too. Each wanted to maintain or increase its territory and power and to preserve the people's way of life. The tribes also wanted government protection from their enemies—and from settlers as well.



FIGURE 7.3: Negotiations between Isaac Stevens and chiefs of the Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille lasted for nine days at Council Grove as each participant struggled to express his needs and concerns—all through interpreters. Montana artist E. S. Paxson (1852–1919) imagined the meeting for this mural.



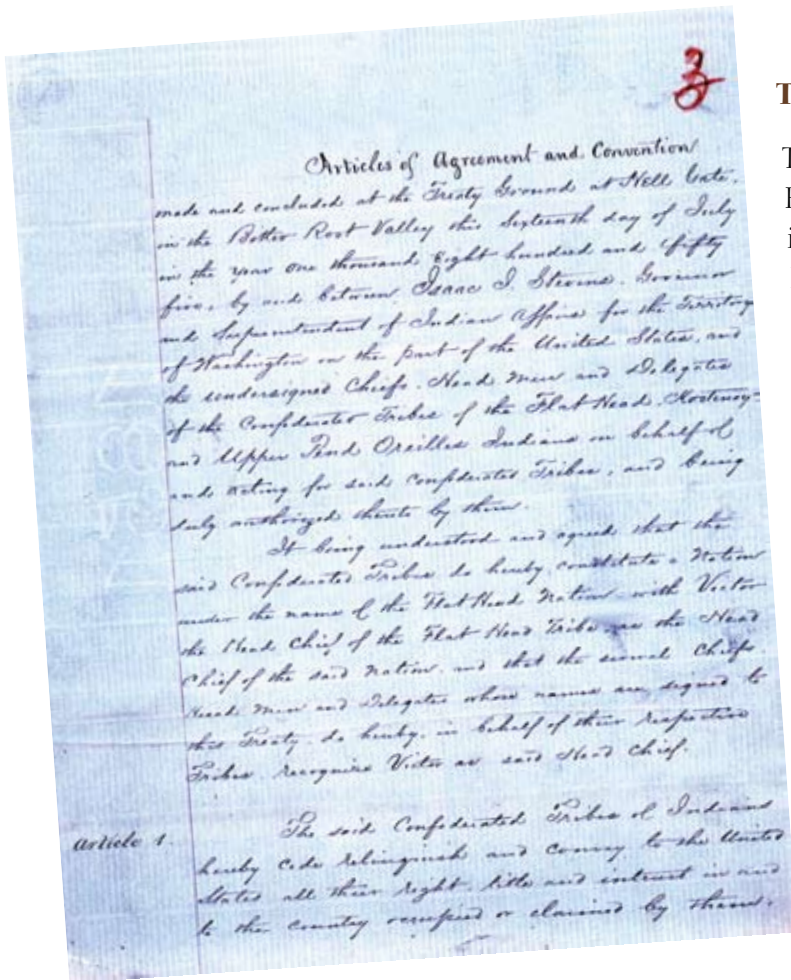


FIGURE 7.4: Most of the time, government agents did not completely explain to the Indians what the treaties included, what they meant, or how they would change life for the Indian people. Above is a page from the Hellgate Treaty, negotiated in 1855.

## The Trouble with Treaties

There were four basic problems with the treaties. First, the treaties were based on the Euro-American idea that land could be bought and sold. Plains and Plateau Indian tribes fought to control territory, but they did not believe that land was something an individual or tribe could own, much less buy or sell. In most Plains Indian traditions, the land was the supreme provider of all life. It was literally made up of the blood and bones of the people's ancestors. These opposing ideas led to many conflicts over the land.

Another problem was the language difference. U.S. government representatives spoke English; tribal leaders each spoke their own tribal language. Every idea had to go through several translations—and often the translators were not very skillful. So there were many misunderstandings.

A third problem was that government representatives misunderstood the structure of Indian tribes. They assumed that Indian chiefs could speak for their people the way a U.S. president could do. But this was not the way tribes

organized themselves. Different tribes had different political structures. Individual bands had military leaders, political leaders, and spiritual leaders. The people looked to these chiefs for their wisdom and experience, but they were not necessarily obligated to do what they said.

Sometimes negotiators for the U.S. side took advantage of this loose organization of tribal leaders. If one chief refused to sign a treaty, the negotiators would simply find a different chief who would sign. But the government still expected all tribal members to **comply** (go along) with the treaty, no matter which chief signed. Then, if some bands or individual tribal members did not comply with terms of the treaties, the U.S. government sent in military troops to force them to comply.

The fourth big problem with the U.S.–Indian treaties was that the U.S. government often did not live up to its agreements. It allowed white settlers to trespass on Indian land that it had promised in the treaties to protect. It paid tribes in supplies they did not need. Or it sent low-quality, spoiled food and broken equipment. And corrupt government contractors and agents often simply stole tribal money.

Sometimes new **administrations** (people leading the government) ignored deals negotiated by earlier government officials. A few times Congress refused to **ratify** (formally approve) treaties that had already been signed. Congress often changed the terms of treaties after they were signed—without informing the tribes.

## Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851

In the 1850s the government negotiated three main treaties involving Indian tribes of present-day Montana. The first was near Fort Laramie, in present-day Wyoming, in 1851. Its purpose was to provide safety for settlers traveling along the Oregon Trail. The government invited leaders from the Lakota, Crow, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Northern Cheyenne, Shoshone, and other tribes. Word did not reach the Blackfeet in time for them to attend.

The treaty defined each tribe's territory—except for the Northern Cheyenne's and Arapaho's, since the government did not recognize them as separate tribes from their southern relatives. Identifying tribal territories was the first step toward establishing reservations.

The treaty also obligated the tribes to make peace with one another and to allow the United States to build roads, railroads, and forts on tribal lands. The treaty also stated that the Indian people would obey the treaty that their chiefs signed, even if they disagreed with it.

In turn, the United States agreed to pay a total of \$50,000 (equal to \$1.3 million today) per year for 50 years in exchange for letting settlers and railroads cross tribal lands. (Congress later reduced the

*FIGURE 7.5* John Mix Stanley (1814–1872) crossed present-day Montana with Isaac Stevens in the 1850s to paint and draw American Indian people and scenes. He drew this picture, called *Victor's Camp—Hell Gate Ronde*, in 1853. Two years later Stevens returned to this spot to negotiate the Hellgate Treaty.



50 years to 10 years.) The payments would be in the form of provisions, merchandise, cattle, and farming tools and would be distributed among the tribes. The government also agreed to protect tribal lands from damage or losses caused by U.S. citizens and to pay for any losses that U.S. citizens might cause.

### Hellgate Treaty of 1855

As more settlers pressed westward, the government increased pressure on Indian tribes to cede more land for settlements. In 1855 Isaac Stevens, governor of Washington Territory, traveled through the region meeting with Indian leaders. (At that time, Washington Territory included much of Montana.)

In July Stevens met with the Salish and Pend d'Oreille tribes at Council Grove, west of present-day Missoula. The Salish called this place

Čímé (chil-meh). Stevens asked the Kootenai, Salish, and Pend d'Oreille tribes to cede a large portion of their traditional lands to the United States and to all live together on one reservation in the Flathead Valley called the Jocko Reserve. In exchange, the United States promised to pay the tribes \$120,000 per year for 20 years in annuities.

All negotiations took place between interpreters—and there were many areas of misunderstanding. One Jesuit observer said the translations were so poor that “not a tenth of it was actually understood by either party.”

Tribal leaders debated heatedly. Big Canoe, a Pend d'Oreille chief, said, “If I go into your country and say, ‘Give me this,’ would you give it to me? . . . I have nothing to say about selling the land.” In the end, however, Pend d'Oreille chief Alexander and Flathead chief Michel both signed the treaty. Salish chief Victor objected to leaving the Bitterroot Valley,

FIGURE 7.6: German American artist Gustavus Sohon (1825–1903) attended the October 1855 Lame Bull's Treaty council as a translator and drew this image of Blood Indians coming to the council.



the heart of Salish territory. Victor signed the treaty only after Stevens added a section temporarily reserving part of the Bitterroot Valley as Salish lands.

Everyone left the treaty council with different ideas about what the agreement said. Tribal leaders thought they had agreed simply to share some of their vast tribal lands with a few settlers and to allow roads across it in return for compensation. They also believed that the treaty guaranteed the Salish the right to remain in the Bitterroot permanently.

But the government saw it differently. The United States believed that the tribes had ceded all lands except the present-day Flathead Reservation, and that the Salish had agreed to stay in the Bitterroot only temporarily. The treaty also allowed the government to pay compensation to the tribes in whatever way the president thought was best. The tribes had no say in when or how they would be paid.

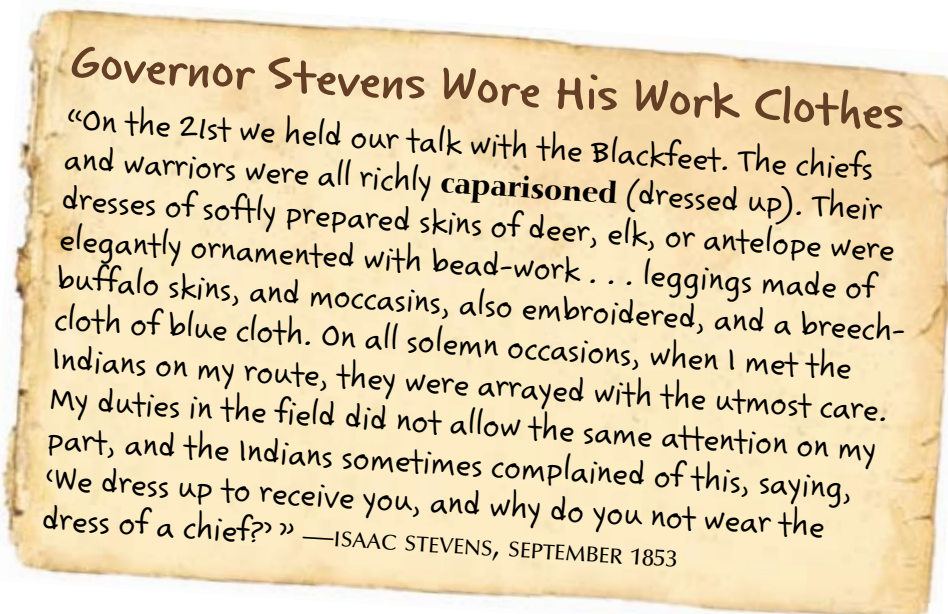
### Lame Bull's Treaty of 1855

In October Stevens met with members of the Blackfeet Confederacy at the Judith River, which the Blackfeet called *Oo-tah-kwi-si-sa-tan*, meaning "Yellow River." Pend d'Oreille, Kootenai, Nez Perce, and Cree leaders also attended. Here Stevens told the tribes that his goal was to end warfare between the tribes and bring peace.

This treaty outlined a large region in present-day central Montana as a common hunting ground to be shared by all tribes in the region. In exchange for sharing hunting grounds without warfare and for allowing the United States to build roads and railroads across Indian lands, the U.S. government agreed to pay each tribe \$20,000 (equal to about \$423,000 today) every year for ten years. The payment was to be made in the form of "useful goods and provisions," with the U.S. government, not tribal leaders, choosing what those goods would be. The United States also agreed to protect tribal territories from white settlements for 99 years.

Once again, Indian leaders believed they had signed a treaty that solidified tribal friendships with the United States. They also believed the treaty guaranteed them protection from settlers and offered payments in exchange for allowing settlers to travel across their land.

The United States did not see it that way. A few days after the treaty was signed, an Oregon newspaper announced that all land not







**FIGURE 7.7:** Eight-year-old Charley Thomas and his dad, William, were among the immigrants killed along the Bozeman Trail in 1866. The Thomas family later donated Charley's boot, along with other artifacts, to the Montana Historical Society.



**FIGURE 7.8:** Red Cloud (his Sioux name was Makhpi-ah Lut-ah) was one of nine children. He **broke** (trained) his first horse at about the age of six, and when he got a little older he could swim across the Missouri River. He grew up to be a respected military leader of the Lakota Sioux. People who knew him said he was brave, fair, and courteous.

specifically set aside as Indian reservation was now open to settlement. This is why, when gold was discovered in present-day Montana seven years later, prospectors and settlers saw the land around the gold fields as open for the taking.

### **The Bozeman Trail and Red Cloud's War**

The 99-year protection of tribal lands that the United States promised in Lane Bull's treaty lasted barely 7 years. In 1862 the Montana gold rushes started. Prospectors and settlers began pouring into the region.

The following year two trail guides, Jim Bridger and John Bozeman, began guiding settlers in wagon trains up a shortcut to Montana's gold fields from the Oregon Trail. This shortcut crossed right through the last undisturbed bison hunting grounds of southeast Montana and northern Wyoming. In 1866 alone, nearly 2,000 immigrants trespassed on land specifically protected by the 1851 treaty at Fort Laramie. The settlers called this shortcut the Bozeman Trail.

The Lakota and Northern Cheyenne sent military groups to protect their hunting grounds. They called on the U.S. Army for help. But instead of protecting the Indian land from the settlers, the army built four army posts along the Bozeman Trail to protect the settlers from Indian attack. Over the next two years, Lakota military leader Makhpi-ah Lut-ah, whom the whites called Red Cloud, led a series of attacks on these forts. These attacks became known as Red Cloud's War.

Meanwhile, the Crow tribe negotiated for power, too. For years the Sioux had been expanding into Crow territory, pushing them westward off their traditional lands. The Crow tribe wanted the United States to help them defend their lands. The Crow decided to ally themselves with the U.S. Army against the Sioux, their **ancestral** (going back for many years) enemies.

Lakota attacks along the Bozeman Trail lasted for several years. In 1868 the army abandoned the forts and closed the Bozeman Trail—partly because a new transcontinental railroad focused overland traffic through Corinne, Utah. As the soldiers marched away from the Bozeman Trail, Lakota and Cheyenne warriors burned the forts behind them.

### **1868 Fort Laramie Treaty—Trying Again**

In 1868 the government came back to Fort Laramie to offer the Sioux and other tribes a new treaty. Many Sioux leaders resisted giving up any territory. But, in the end, because the new treaty promised protection for Indian lands, the tribes signed.

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 assigned about half of present-day North and South Dakota to the Sioux and guaranteed them hunting rights as far west as the Bighorn River. The treaty took land away from

the Crow, who were allies of the United States, and gave it to the Sioux, the Crow tribe's ancestral enemies. Crow tribal lands, guaranteed in the 1851 treaty, were reduced to a small region of central Montana south of the Yellowstone River, between present-day Livingston and the Tongue River.

The United States also promised to provide both tribes with seed and farm equipment, schools, and government agencies to help distribute other forms of aid. Just as before, the treaty did not acknowledge the territory of either the Northern Cheyenne or the Northern Arapaho.

Once again, the treaty created misunderstandings between the Indians and the government. Red Cloud claimed that the treaty affirmed Sioux domination over the region. The government, however, thought that by welcoming schools, farms, and government agencies, the Sioux would settle on their reservation and begin assimilating into Euro-American society. Both sides were wrong about each other.

## Two Ways of Life Collide

The records of the treaty councils tell a lot about what people were thinking. In the 1850s native tribes still controlled the Northern Plains. But increasingly, Indian people saw themselves as unwilling hosts to rude and greedy guests, who demanded resources, fenced off land, and seemed to want everything for themselves.

The government officials represented a nation that believed in **Manifest Destiny** (the idea that the United States had a moral duty to expand its culture across the continent—see Chapter 4). They believed their way of life was so much

### “His Presence Here Is an Insult”

“When the Great Father at Washington sent us his chief soldier to ask for a path through our hunting grounds, a way for his iron horse [railroad] to the mountains and the western sea, we were told that they merely wished to pass through our country, not to tarry among us, but to seek for gold in the far west, . . . Our old chiefs thought to show their friendship and goodwill, when they allowed this dangerous snake in our midst. They promised to protect the wayfarers.

“Yet, before the ashes of the council fire was cold, the Great Father is building his forts among us . . . His presence here is an insult and a threat. It is an insult to the spirits of my ancestors. Are we then to give up their sacred graves to be plowed under for corn?”

—CHIEF RED CLOUD AT THE 1868 FORT LARAMIE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

*FIGURE 7.9:* Commissioners from the U.S. government and representatives from the Arapaho and many bands of the Sioux met under a tent in Wyoming in 1868 to negotiate a new treaty. All groups did not attend the same council on the same day. It took a series of meetings, spread out between May and November, for all of the bands to sign the treaty.



“What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms . . . and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?”

—PRESIDENT ANDREW JACKSON, 1830

FIGURE 7.10: In the 1800s many Euro-Americans believed that industrial progress and educational **enlightenment** (learning or awakening) would make the world a better place. In 1872 John Gast painted *American Progress*, which depicted a goddess-like “America” floating westward carrying a schoolbook (representing education) and a telegraph wire (representing technology). Bison and Indians are running away, while farmers, settlers, and railroads march confidently on.

better that the Indians would soon abandon their own way of living, become farmers, and **assimilate** (be absorbed) into **mainstream** (majority) American society.

Settlers assumed that because Indian people did not build buildings, farms, and towns, the Indians were not really using the land. They also believed that the federal government should protect them from Indian attacks—even when they were trespassing on Indian land.

Many settlers also had exaggerated fears about the American Indians around them. They did not understand Indian people’s way of life, their values, or their traditions, and—like people everywhere—they often feared what they did not understand.

### Some Moments of Sharing and Friendship

Yet even among the many misunderstandings of this time, many Indian and non-Indian people enjoyed peaceful, positive interactions.



Indians and non-Indians traded, married, and befriended one another. Several stories tell of Indian bands traveling through Helena, Hamilton, and Deer Lodge who camped outside town and staged friendly horse races against the townsfolk.

Sometimes Indian people helped the **emigrants** (people moving from their home country to settle in a new place) traveling across their land. One emigrant mother crossing the plains laid her infant in some tall grass while she helped push a wagon out of the mud. Moments later she turned to see a small gathering of Indian women around her baby. She yelled in fear, but as she ran closer she realized the women were not hurting her child—they were singing to her.

## Shifting Strategies of Survival and Defense

By the 1870s the conflicts between the U.S. government and the Indian tribes had shifted from control of the roads to control over the land itself. Montana Territory now claimed more than 20,000 non-Indian residents. Its mines, towns, and lumber camps generated profits that were important to the nation's economy. The government wanted to protect the safety of these non-Indian citizens and the economic expansion of American businesses.

“What kind of animal would sell the land where lie the bones of his father?”

—CHIEF JOSEPH, NEZ PERCE, 1879

*FIGURE 7.11:* Most American Indians saw their world very differently than did Euro-Americans. This was their homeland, given them by the Creator, which they were protecting from intruders who acted selfishly and always wanted more. While some tribes were willing to share land and resources with settlers, they were not willing to give up their land and way of life to do so. Swiss painter Karl Bodmer (1809–1893) recorded this view of a Blackfeet camp after visiting the West in the 1830s.



## Later Agreements Take More Land

Railroad, mining, and ranching interests were quick to pressure the U.S. government to open more land for development. In response, the U.S. government repeatedly went back to the tribes to negotiate new agreements. Sometimes the government did not even negotiate. For example, in 1873 President Ulysses S. Grant signed an executive order establishing most of Montana north of the Missouri River as a reservation for the Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, and Sioux. A year later he issued another executive order shifting the southern boundary of that reservation north to the Marias River—cutting out some of the best traditional Blackfeet hunting lands.

The government also insisted that Indians move to the reservations to prevent conflict between Indians and their new non-Indian neighbors. When the Indians refused to go, the government sent the army.

## Civil War Military Strategy on the Plains

The military leaders assigned to Montana brought with them the strategies and experiences they had gained from the Civil War (1861–65). In the Civil War, opposing armies settled into position before attacking each other on a battlefield. But Plains Indian warriors did not fight this way. Their battles emphasized personal bravery, horsemanship, and **counting coup** (earning respect by touching an enemy or taking his horse, usually without killing him).

*FIGURE 7.12:* These soldiers in a Gatling gun battery at Fort Abraham Lincoln (Dakota Territory) had to maneuver 90-pound **Gatling guns** (early machine guns on wheels) and other heavy equipment into battle.



On the Plains, fleet groups of Indian warriors on horseback could easily evade slow-moving American troops trailing tons of equipment and supplies. By the time an army detachment got to where they thought an opposing band might be, whole Indian camps would be long gone. This meant that there were very few opportunities for the army to attack Indian warriors.

As a result army field commanders expanded on a strategy they had used in the Civil War called “total warfare.” The objective of total warfare was to weaken

the people and destroy their resources until the people surrendered. During the Civil War, the Union army had burned farms and crops, leaving many Southern women and children without food or shelter. The army transferred this strategy to the Plains. They attacked Indian camps at dawn, shooting into tipis. After the Indians fled, the soldiers burned their shelters and whatever belongings or food they left behind. The results for the Indian tribes were devastating.

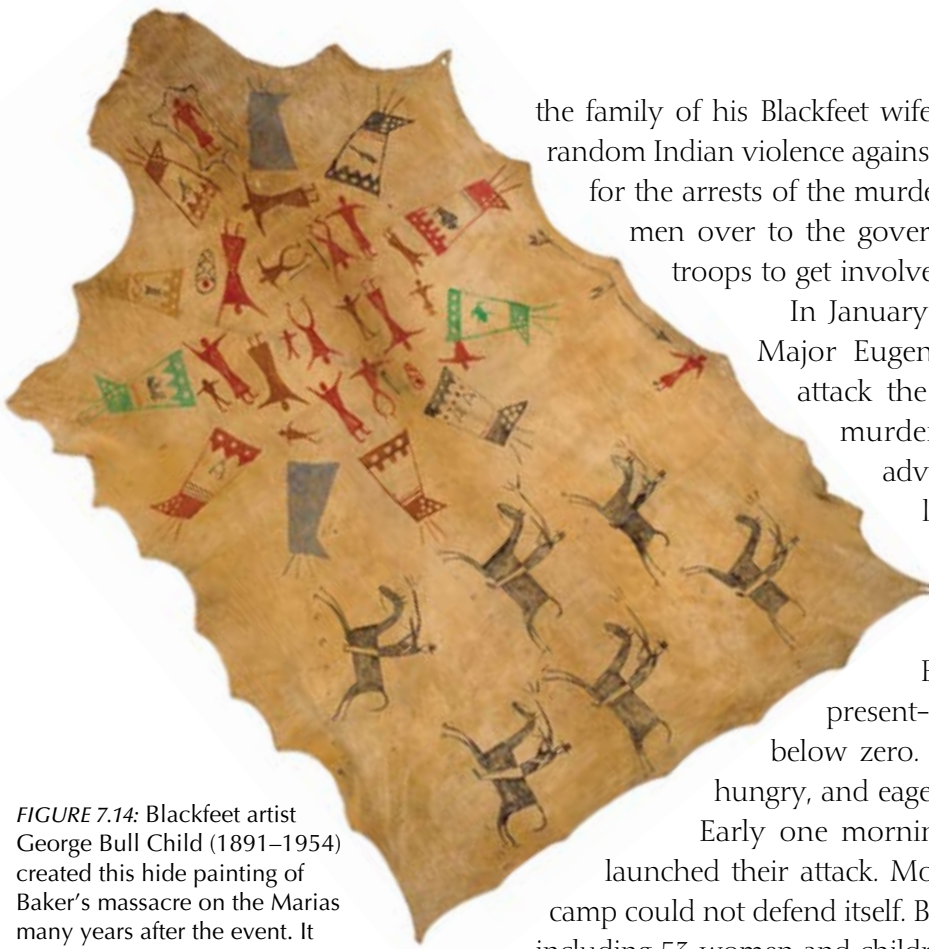
**“Total War” on a Peaceful Camp**  
“Chief Heavy Runner ran from his lodge toward the seizers [soldiers] on the bank. He was shouting to them and waving a paper writing that our agent had given him, a writing saying that he was a good and peaceful man, a friend of the whites. He had run but a few steps when he fell, his body pierced with bullets. Inside the lodges men were yelling; terribly frightened women and children screaming—screaming from wounds, from pain as they died. I saw a few men and women, escaping from their lodges, shot down as they ran.”  
—BEAR HEAD, A SURVIVOR OF THE MARIAS MASSACRE

### 1870 Massacre on the Marias: “Strike Them Hard”

Among the most dishonorable episodes in the history of the Indian wars was the Massacre on the Marias. In 1869 some Blackfeet men killed a well-known settler named Malcolm Clarke at his ranch near Helena. His murder was one act in a continuing family feud between Clarke and

FIGURE 7.13: Blackfeet artist King Kuka (1946–2004) painted this scene of Heavy Runner’s camp as he imagined it looked the morning of the massacre, just moments before Baker’s soldiers attacked.





**FIGURE 7.14:** Blackfeet artist George Bull Child (1891–1954) created this hide painting of Baker’s massacre on the Marias many years after the event. It shows army soldiers attacking the camp, which is represented by tipis painted with ceremonial images. Men, women, children, and infants wrapped in cradleboards lie dead within the village.



**FIGURE 7.15:** Ashi-shi-she (called Curley) was one of several Crow scouts who allied with the United States during the battles of 1876. Ashi-shi-she witnessed part of the Battle of the Little Bighorn and later told his version of the story to several newspaper reporters.

the family of his Blackfeet wife. But the surrounding settlers saw it as random Indian violence against innocent citizens. Warrants were issued for the arrests of the murderers. When the tribe refused to turn the men over to the government, the governor requested federal troops to get involved.

In January 1870 General Philip Sheridan ordered Major Eugene Baker and the Second Cavalry to attack the camp of Mountain Chief, where the murderers were thought to be. Sheridan advocated the strategy of total warfare. “If the lives and property of citizens of Montana can best be protected by striking the Indians, I want them struck,” Sheridan said. “Tell Baker to strike them hard.”

Baker and his troops left Fort Ellis (near present-day Bozeman) in temperatures near 30°F below zero. They reached the Marias River frozen, hungry, and eager to do their job and go home.

Early one morning they spotted a Blackfeet camp and launched their attack. Most of the men were off hunting, so the camp could not defend itself. Baker’s soldiers killed 173 people that day, including 53 women and children. But they did not find the murderers. They had attacked the wrong camp.

The massacre on the Marias River shocked and horrified the Blackfeet tribe. They realized there was no victory—or honor—to be gained fighting the whites. That winter 2,000 Blackfeet died of smallpox. After that, the Blackfeet tribe did not make war against the United States.

### **The Crow Strategy: Cooperation**

Each tribe chose its own strategy for survival under increasing pressures—not only from expanding settlements but also from enemy tribes who were themselves being pushed off their lands.

The Crow chose to ally with the U.S. government against a common enemy, the Sioux. The Crow were surrounded by enemies—Sioux to the east, Assiniboine to the north, and Cheyenne to the south. Sioux forces had pushed the Crow tribe west from its traditional homelands into the Powder River area, cutting off the tribe from its traditional trade routes.

As Crow leader Plenty Coups later explained, “Our leading chiefs saw that to help the white men fight their enemies and ours would make them our friends . . . We plainly saw that this course was the only one which might save our beautiful country for us.”

However, instead of respecting the Crow tribe as an ally, the government treated the Crow the same way it treated other tribes. Within 25 years the 39-million-acre Crow Reservation was reduced to 1.8 million acres.

## The Salish Strategy: Economic Independence

The Salish tribe chose to seek economic independence while practicing nonmilitary resistance. Many Salish and Pend d'Oreille families recognized that since game animals were growing scarce, they needed to adopt new ways. They planted crops and built dairies, combining farming with traditional activities like bison hunting and camas gathering. By 1868 there were 50 profitable Salish farms in the Bitterroot Valley and 80 in the Flathead Valley.

In the Bitterroot Valley, settlements crowded in around Salish farms. Salish people struggled to maintain peaceful relations. But they could not convince the U.S. government to leave them alone.

In 1871 the president issued an executive order forcing the Salish people out of the Bitterroot Valley and onto the Flathead Reservation. The order stated that the government had surveyed the Bitterroot and determined that the Flathead Reservation was a better place for the Salish.

Salish chief Charlot protested. He and his people did not want to leave their home. When a government agent forged Charlot's mark on an agreement, he accused the agent of lying—and was eventually proven right. Meanwhile, settlers continued to take up land in the lush Bitterroot Valley.

In 1889, however, a drought pitched Charlot's band into near-starvation. The bison were almost gone. Charlot and his band finally gave in to the pressure to move. He negotiated an agreement for the government to buy out the Salish land in the Bitterroot. The Salish planted no crops that year in preparation for the move.

Then the government stalled. For two years no payments came. The Bitterroot Salish almost starved. In October 1891 army troops from Fort Missoula rode out to accompany the Salish people on their forced march north to the Flathead Reservation. Chief Charlot and his people held an all-night prayer vigil and feast. The following morning they gathered on the main street of Stevensville. The



*FIGURE 7.16:* This photo was taken October 15, 1891, the day the Salish began their march from the Bitterroot Valley. Chief Charlot's wife and daughter sit in front of the tipi at right. As the Salish left, crowds of white settlers stood silently watching. Mary Ronan, wife of Flathead Reservation agent Peter Ronan, wrote in her diary that Chief Charlot "bore himself with reserve, dignity, and pride . . . like a king in exile."



“It was a terrible battle . . . a hard battle because both sides were brave warriors.”

—RED FEATHER, LAKOTA, REMEMBERING THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

*FIGURE 7.17:* Pretty Shield, a Crow medicine woman who lived near the Bighorn Valley, said later, “I do know that this country smelled of dead men for a whole summer after the fight, and that we moved away from here, because we could not stand it. Ahh, war is bad. There is always somebody missing, because of war.” This photo, taken three years after the battle, shows a pile of bones—the skeletons of cavalry horses—on the Little Bighorn battlefield.



Catholic priest blessed them. They sang Dies Irae—“The Day of Wrath,” a funeral dirge—before marching north.

### Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Strategy: Armed Resistance

The Sioux and Northern Cheyenne chose armed resistance. In 1874, just six years after the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, prospectors accompanied a cavalry expedition to the Black Hills of South Dakota. They discovered gold. This was in the very heart of Sioux territory protected by treaty, but that did not stop the eager miners.

As gold seekers rushed in, the government offered to purchase the Black Hills from the Sioux. The chiefs refused to sell. Then the government tried to force the Sioux onto their reservation. The Sioux refused to go. In the spring of 1876, both the U.S. Army and the Sioux prepared for war.

The army gathered several thousand soldiers on the Plains—including Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer’s Seventh U.S. Cavalry—plus about 300 Crow and Shoshone warriors. Meanwhile, approximately 5,000 Sioux and Cheyenne people, including 1,500 warriors, gathered in eastern Montana. They were led by Sioux chiefs Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, and Northern Cheyenne chief Two Moon.

U.S. troops and tribal warriors met in several fights that spring and summer. One of the largest was the Battle of the Rosebud on June 17. During this battle there were many acts of bravery on both sides. One involved a girl named Buffalo Calf Road Woman, who rescued her brother, Comes-In-Sight, after his horse was killed. In her honor, the Cheyenne people call the Battle of the Rosebud *Kese’eehe Tsevo’estaneohtse hestatanemo* (kse’EEHE tseh-VOH’ stah-neh-veoh-tse HEH-stah-dah-nem): “Where the Girl Saved Her Brother.”

### June 25–26, 1876: Battle of Little Bighorn

The largest and most famous battle happened on June 25–26, 1876. This was the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Army scouts reported a huge Sioux and Northern Cheyenne camp in the Little Bighorn Valley—called Greasy Grass by the Sioux. Army leaders formulated a plan: The Seventh Cavalry, led by Custer, would head up the Rosebud Valley so they could attack the Sioux and Cheyenne camp from the east. The remaining troops would move west to the Bighorn River, following that stream south to attack. The army hoped to locate the Indian camp and quickly defeat it.

Custer and the Seventh Cavalry, together with his

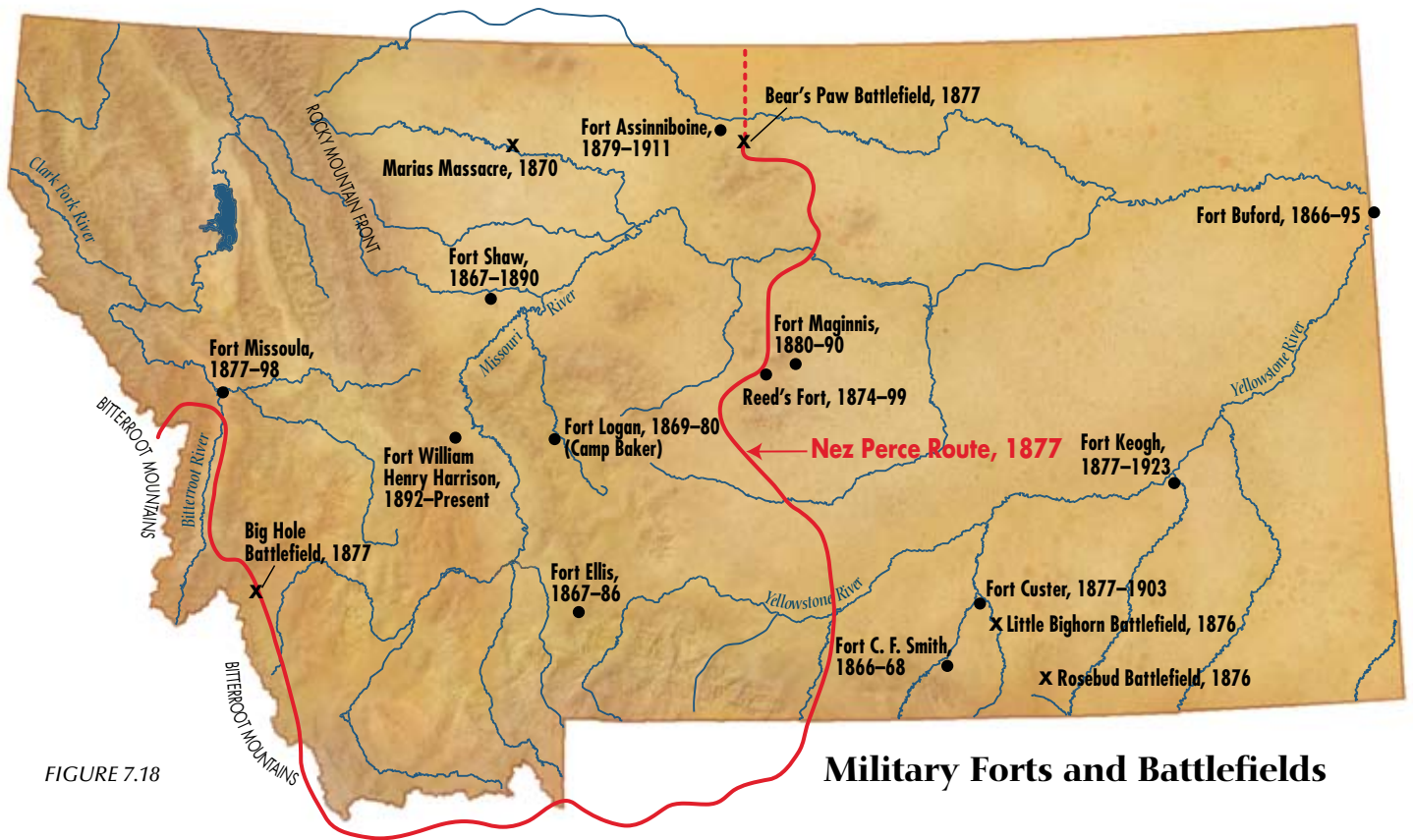


FIGURE 7.18

## Military Forts and Battlefields

Crow and Arikara scouts, moved quickly. Army plans called for a coordinated attack about June 26, but on June 25 Custer learned that the Sioux already knew of his presence, and he moved to attack their village. As his troops moved in, Sitting Bull's followers rose up before them—a tidal wave of 1,500 warriors.

In less than three hours, Custer and his immediate command lay dead, while his remaining battalions hunkered down to await relief. The Indians finally departed. It was a devastating loss for the U.S. Army.

### Public Opinion Turns against the Indians

Custer's defeat at the hands of the Sioux and Cheyenne **infuriated** (angered) the American people. That fall and winter, the army hunted down the remaining Sioux and Northern Cheyenne bands with renewed intensity. They attacked the Indian camps, burned their food supplies and tipis, and captured their horses. One by one, most of the leaders, including Crazy Horse, surrendered and agreed to go to reservations. Sitting Bull, however, did not surrender. He and

### The Life of a Frontier Soldier

Life in the frontier army could be very hard. The battles were terrifying—but the day-to-day grind seemed even worse to many enlisted men. This was especially true during bad weather or when food ran short. Packer David Mears remembered his service during the Powder River campaign of 1876: "We dared not build a fire . . . Our spread for dinner was frozen beans, frozen bread, with snow balls and pepper on the side; supper the same, less the beans. We began to think that the government was treating us rather cool [badly]."

**“Has rained steadily for forty-eight hours . . . No shelter of any kind. Stood up all night with blankets over our shoulders and soaking wet.”**

—PRIVATE WILLIAM JORDAN, FOURTEENTH INFANTRY, AUGUST 12, 1876

## A Country Set Apart

“There came a white officer who invited all the Nez Percés to a treaty council . . . He said there were a great many white people in the country, and . . . he wanted the land marked out so that the Indians and white men could be separated. If they were to live in peace it was necessary, he said, that the Indians should have a country set apart for them, and in that country they must stay. My father, who represented his band, refused to have anything to do with the council, because he wished to be a free man. He claimed that no man owned any part of the earth, and a man could not sell what he did not own.”

—CHIEF JOSEPH, NEZ PERCE, 1879

thousands of followers moved into Canada, where U.S. troops could not follow. But with the buffalo nearly gone, they had a hard time surviving. Sitting Bull returned to the United States, surrendering to the army in 1881.

### 1877: The Nez Perce War

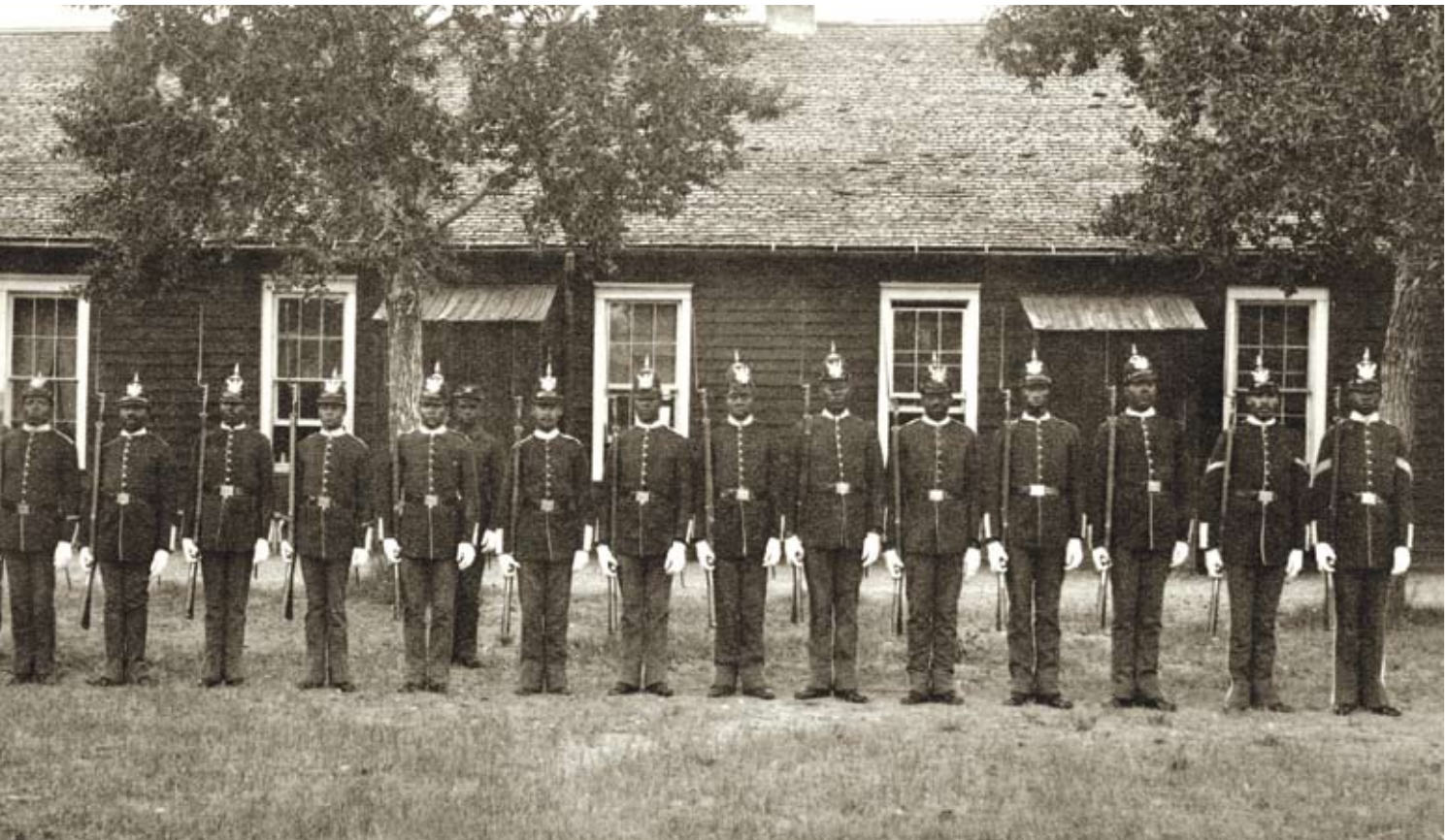
In 1877 several Nez Perce bands fled their homeland in a four-month campaign for freedom that began in Oregon and ended

in Montana. These bands of Nez Perce had never signed a treaty with the United States. When they were ordered to leave their homeland in Oregon and go onto a reservation in northern Idaho, they refused to go. “The white man has no right to take our country,” one of their leaders, Chief Joseph, told the government agents. “We are free. We will go where we please.”

About 700 Nez Perce men, women, and children traveled nearly 1,400 miles across the Rocky Mountains. Many times they outwitted the pursuing army. When soldiers lay in wait at the mouth of Lolo Canyon (near present-day Missoula), the Nez Perce silently walked around them in the middle of the night.

One August dawn, the army attacked the Nez Perce camp on the North Fork of the Big Hole River. The army overwhelmed the

**FIGURE 7.19:** The U.S. Army included many African American soldiers. These soldiers served in **segregated** (separated by race) regiments because the U.S. Army was segregated until 1948. Indians called them “buffalo soldiers,” supposedly because of their curly dark hair and fighting spirit. These buffalo soldiers stand at attention at Fort Shaw in 1890.



sleeping camp, burned lodges, and shot at the fleeing Nez Perce, including women and children. But their military leaders, White Bird and Looking Glass, urged their warriors to fight instead of run. After a day-long battle, the army retreated.

Nursing their wounded, carrying their children, and in mourning for their dead, the Nez Perce fled south and east, then threaded their way to the Bear's Paw Mountains—just 40 miles from the Canadian border, where they would be safe. Here Colonel Nelson Miles and an army of 350 soldiers caught up with them and led a surprise attack on the resting camps.

The Battle of the Bear's Paw Mountains lasted for days and killed many fighters on both sides. Some of the Nez Perce people slipped away during the battle. This group made it to the Milk River, where they met a band of Métis. The Métis gave them food and helped them across the Canadian border. Descendants of these Nez Perce still live there today. Others, including Chief Joseph, surrendered on October 5, 1877.

### 1878: The Northern Cheyenne Autumn

After the Battle of the Little Bighorn, many Northern Cheyenne people were forced south to join the Southern Cheyenne at Fort Reno in present-day

**FIGURE 7.20:** Northern Cheyenne chief O'kohomoxhaahketa (pronounced O-KOOM-xah-ket; on left) was known as Little Wolf. Anthropologist George Bird Grinnell, who met Little Wolf years later, called him "the greatest Indian I have ever known." On the right is Voohe'eva (Voo-HE-va), whose name means Morning Star but who was called Dull Knife. Today, Chief Dull Knife College on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation is a living testament to the leadership of Morning Star.

**“Our land is everything to us. I will tell you one of the things we remember on our land. We remember that our grandfathers paid for it with their lives.”**

—JOHN WOODENLEGS, NORTHERN CHEYENNE HISTORIAN

**“Our hearts looked and longed for this country where we were born. There are only a few of us left, and we only wanted a little ground where we could live.”**

—CHIEF LITTLE WOLF OF THE NORTHERN CHEYENNE, SPEAKING TO LIEUTENANT CLARK OF THE U.S. ARMY UPON HIS ARRIVAL AT FORT KEOGH, APRIL 1, 1879



## “Don’t You Think He Was a Brave Young Man?”

During the Cheyenne’s escape, two children hid from the soldiers in a pit on a riverbank. According to their mother, Iron Teeth, when the soldier came near, the boy told his sister, “Lie down, and I will cover you with leaves and dirt. Then I will climb out and fight the soldiers. They will kill me, but they will think I am the only one here, and they will go away after I am dead. When they are gone, you can come out and hunt for our mother.” The next day she came out, but the soldiers caught her.

“I tell you now the name of my son who was killed: we called him Mon-see-yo-mon—Gathering his Medicine. Lots of times, as I sit here alone on the floor with my blanket wrapped about me, I lean forward and close my eyes and think of him standing up out of the pit and fighting the soldiers, knowing that he would be killed, but doing this so that his little sister might get away to safety. Don’t you think he was a brave young man?”

**FIGURE 7.21:** Little Fingernail, a Northern Cheyenne warrior, was killed helping his people escape from Fort Robinson in 1879. Strapped to his chest was a ledger book filled with drawings he had made chronicling the Northern Cheyenne’s fight to return to Montana. The bullet that killed him first passed through the ledger book, which is why this drawing is torn.



Oklahoma. Fort Reno was like a refugee camp. There was not enough food or medicine. Two-thirds of the Northern Cheyenne people became seriously ill. They thought they might all die there. One year after they arrived, Northern Cheyenne leaders Dull Knife and Little Wolf decided to help their people escape and try to make it home.

In September 1878 Dull Knife and Little Wolf led 353 of their people in a dramatic escape from Fort Reno. They traveled by moonlight, hid in broken timber, and tried to evade the soldiers sent to track them down. Near the Platte River in Nebraska, the group split up.

Chief Little Wolf led one group to the Powder River area of Montana. They made it to Fort Keogh (near present-day Miles City).

Chief Dull Knife, meanwhile, led 150 people northeast toward Sioux territory to seek help. In October they were captured by soldiers who took them to Fort Robinson, Nebraska. Here the army tried to pressure Dull Knife into returning to Oklahoma. When he refused, soldiers locked Dull Knife and his people into **barracks** (military living quarters) without food or heat.

After seven days the people grew desperate. They said, "It is true that we must die, but we will not die shut up here like dogs. We will die on the prairie; we will die fighting." They dressed in their finest clothes. They had taken their guns apart and braided the pieces into the children's hair to hide them. Now they put them back together again. That night they broke two windows and ran for freedom through a hail of gunfire.

In the first few minutes, 26 Cheyenne were killed. The people ran through ice and snow in below-zero weather for 13 days, hunted by U.S. soldiers. Of the 150 people captured with Chief Dull Knife, only about 50 made it back to their home in Montana. In 1884, with strong support from General Miles and other officials at Fort Keogh, they secured a reservation on the Tongue River.

### 1882: Louis Riel and the Métis Resistance

In the 1860s the Métis people of southern Canada set up their own territorial government led by Louis Riel. It was a government founded on democratic principles and **civil rights** (fundamental rights). In 1870 the Canadian government took over the Métis farms and towns and claimed Métis lands for English-speaking Canadians. Riel led a 15-year fight for **indigenous** (native) rights.

Riel was hanged in 1885 for helping lead a rebellion against the Canadian government to protect Métis rights. Many of his followers

*FIGURE 7.22:* In the mid-1800s bison hunters slaughtered millions of bison to supply the growing demand for bison hides. Most of the hides furnished belts that ran machinery in factories in the East and in Europe.



fled to Montana, where they went into hiding. Some joined relatives already living on Montana Indian reservations. Others passed for white or settled near cities, creating a landless Indian population.

## A World Comes to an End

In the midst of all this disruption came an even greater tragedy for the Plains people. The huge herds of bison—the foundation of every Plains Indian culture—became almost extinct. Four powerful factors killed off the bison herds: disease from cattle and other livestock, changes in the ecology of the Northern Plains, drought, and a decade of wholesale slaughter by bison hunters (see Chapter 5).

In 1860 there were 13 million bison on the Great Plains. Between 1871 and 1874, 3 million bison were killed each year. By 1883 fewer than 200 animals remained of the species that had been the center of life for 10,000 years.

What is the most important resource in our society today? Is it water? Electricity? Oil? Imagine trying to live without it. Imagine losing something that is so central to your entire way of living that when it disappears everything in your world changes.

The end of the Bison Era meant that the hunter-gatherer way of life came to an abrupt end. The people had fought to protect their hunting grounds from invaders, but now the hunting grounds were empty of bison. Farmers plowed the best bitterroot areas. Settlers homesteaded where the wild asparagus grew.

Army troops kept Montana's Indian people on their reservations (see Chapter 11). There every family entered a period of adjustment as their tribes struggled to adapt to the new reality.

### “After This Nothing Happened”

“When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened.”

—PLENTY COUPS, CROW CHIEF

# Expressions of the People

## Ledger Art

As the lives of Northern Plains Indians changed, their art changed, too. The destruction of bison herds and other game animals meant that the people had fewer hides for painting winter counts or other kinds of art. They began drawing on paper, **muslin** (a heavy cotton cloth), canvas, and prepared cow hides. They usually acquired these items in trade, at reservation agencies. Sometimes they took them from soldiers defeated in battle.

Indian artists also gained access to colored pencils, crayons, and occasionally watercolor paints. These new drawing materials allowed artists to achieve far greater detail than they could get with bone or stick brushes. They also provided a wide variety of colors.

The result was a vibrant new art form. It was called ledger art, because many of the pieces were drawn on paper from **ledger books** (books with lined pages designed for keeping records). Ledger books were widely available and were the cheapest form of paper at the time.

*FIGURE 7.23:* This image shows a fight between Cheyenne and Comanche warriors. Cheyenne artist White Bear drew this picture in 1885. The detail and visual excitement of this picture reveal the artist's pleasure in remembering an exhilarating event.





**FIGURE 7.24:** Gros Ventre artist New Bear drew this picture in about 1884, depicting a successful bison hunt, which he remembered from better days. By the time New Bear drew this picture, bison were almost extinct on the Northern Plains.



Most ledger art was produced between 1860 and 1900—a time of transition from traditional Plains living to life on reservations. Ledger artists were usually men. They depicted important battles, acts of personal heroism, successful bison hunts, or meaningful celebrations that marked traditional life on the Plains. Later, ledger artists depicted different experiences like farming, going to school, or riding on a train.

Whether depicting scenes of battle, boarding school details, or household activities, ledger drawings provide a unique glimpse into the experiences—and the artful expressions—of Montana’s Indian people in transition.

**FIGURE 7.25:** Woodenlegs, a Northern Cheyenne who fought in the Battle of Little Bighorn, later drew many ledger-art drawings, recording scenes he witnessed during the battle.

# CHAPTER 7 REVIEW

## ▶ CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Define: (a) treaty; (b) sovereign; (c) annuity; (d) cede; (e) ratify; (f) Manifest Destiny; (g) emigrant; (h) indigenous
2. Identify: (a) Isaac Stevens; (b) Victor; (c) Red Cloud; (d) Plenty Coups; (e) Sitting Bull; (f) Crazy Horse; (g) George Armstrong Custer; (h) Charlot (i) Joseph; (j) Dull Knife; (k) Nelson Miles
3. What two essential truths did the U.S. government recognize in negotiating treaties?
4. Describe the four main problems that existed with treaties between Indians and the U.S. government.
5. What was the U.S. government's main military strategy for dealing with the Indians?
6. What strategies did the Indians adopt to survive the changes that were occurring in their land during the mid to late 1800s?
7. Along with the arrival of settlers, what other great change occurred on the Plains that affected the Indians?

## ▶ CRITICAL THINKING

1. The text cites several reasons why treaties between Indians and the U.S. government so often failed. What, if any, measures could have been taken to avoid such failures?
2. Compare the strategies of the different tribal nations in dealing with the increasing settlements and the loss of their land. Which strategies do you think were most successful? Why do you think different tribal leaders chose the strategies they used?
3. General William Tecumseh Sherman's March to the Sea, commonly referred to as "total war" or the "scorched earth policy," was one of the most controversial campaigns of the Civil War. What are some of the similarities and differences between the way "total war" was waged in the South during the Civil War and on the Plains in the late 1800s?
4. New Hampshire took its state motto from the words of Revolutionary War general John Stark: "Live free or die: Death is not the worst of evils." How do you think this philosophy might apply to the actions of the Northern Cheyenne in the autumn of 1878?

## ▶ PAST TO PRESENT

1. In 1991 the National Park Service changed the name of Custer Battlefield National Monument to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. How does this change reflect changing attitudes toward the history of the Indian wars?

## ▶ MAKE IT LOCAL

1. Research a fort, battlefield, or military trail near you.

## ▶ EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Research the history of the Hellgate Treaty of 1855 and read modern interpretations of the treaty. In groups, write a dialogue among the Salish, Flathead, and Pend d'Oreille chiefs as they debated the merits and drawbacks of the treaty.
2. Europeans and Indians had very different attitudes about land. Make a chart comparing and contrasting these differences using information from the chapter.
3. Research the buffalo soldiers (see the photo on page 140). Then use your research to write a letter from one of these soldiers to a friend or family member back home.
4. Research and make a map of the Nez Perce Trail beginning at Wallowa Lake, Oregon, and ending at the Bear's Paw Mountains in Montana. Write brief biographies of the main characters, both Indian and white, involved in the Nez Perce War.
5. Find additional examples of ledger art, and read the stories around them. Using colored pencils, follow the style of ledger art to illustrate an event in your own life or the life of your community.

# Credits

The following abbreviations are used in the credits:

BBHC Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming  
GNPA Glacier National Park Archives  
LOC Library of Congress  
MAC Montana Arts Council, Helena  
MDEQ Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Helena  
MDT Montana Department of Transportation, Helena  
MFWP Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena  
MHS Montana Historical Society, Helena  
MHSA Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena  
MHSL Montana Historical Society Library, Helena  
MHS Mus. Montana Historical Society Museum, Helena  
MHS PA Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Helena  
MSU COT Montana State University College of Technology, Billings  
NMAI National Museum American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
MSU Billings Special Collections, Montana State University Billings Library  
NARA National Archives and Records Administration  
NPS National Park Service  
NRIS Natural Resource Information System, Montana State Library, Helena  
SHPO State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Helena  
TM Travel Montana, Helena  
UM Missoula Archives & Special Collections, The University of Montana-Missoula  
USDA United States Department of Agriculture  
USFS United States Forest Service  
WMM World Museum of Mining, Butte

## Chapter 7

- FIG. 7.1 *Going to the Agency to Have a Big Talk*, 1885, White Bear, Cheyenne, MHS Mus.
- FIG. 7.2 Tribal Territories of Montana, 1855, adapted from a map created by the Regional Learning Project, University of Montana, Missoula
- FIG. 7.3 E. S. Paxson, *Signing the 1855 Hell Gate Treaty at Council Grove*, oil, 1914, Missoula County Art Collection, photo by C. Autio, courtesy Missoula Art Museum
- FIG. 7.4 Handwritten page from the Hell Gate Treaty of July 16, 1855, NARA, Washington, D.C.
- FIG. 7.5 *Victor's Camp—Hell Gate Ronde*, lithograph by John M. Stanley, MHS Mus.
- FIG. 7.6 *Bloods Come in Council*, courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma
- FIG. 7.7 Charley Thomas's boot, MHS Mus. 1977.10.01
- FIG. 7.8 Red Cloud, MHS PA 954-795
- FIG. 7.9 *Commissioners in Council with the Arapahoes and Cheyennes*, courtesy Edward E. Ayer Collection, AP 2800 Box Augur 4, The Newberry Library, Chicago, IL
- FIG. 7.10 *American Progress*, John Gast, courtesy LOC
- FIG. 7.11 *Encampment of the Piegan Indians*, Karl Bodmer, MHS Mus. 1988.40.01
- FIG. 7.12 Gatling gun battery, Fort Lincoln, D. T., June 1877, photo by F. Jay Haynes, MHS PA Haynes Foundation Coll. H-61
- FIG. 7.13 *Baker Massacre*, by King Kuka, courtesy Marietta Kuka, Great Falls
- FIG. 7.14 *Baker Fight*, hide by George Bull Child, 1950s, courtesy Denver Art Museum: The L. D. and Ruth Bax Collection, 1985.106, copyright Denver Art Museum
- FIG. 7.15 Curley, Crow Indian, photo by D. F. Barry, MHS PA 955-712
- FIG. 7.16 Flathead Indians, St. Mary's Mission, 1891, photo by A. M. McGee, Hamilton, MT, MHS PA PAc 77-6.6
- FIG. 7.17 Where Custer fell, 1879, photo by S. J. Morrow, MHS PA 981-368
- FIG. 7.18 Military Forts and Battlefields, map by MHS, base map courtesy NRIS
- FIG. 7.19 25th U.S. Infantry, Fort Shaw, 1890, photo by C. Eugene LeMunyon, MHS PA 947-375
- FIG. 7.20 Little Wolf, standing, Dull Knife, seated, 1873, courtesy Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives, Bureau of American Ethnology Collection
- FIG. 7.21 Ledger drawing by Little Fingernail, courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, No. 50, 1/661984
- FIG. 7.22 Killing cows and spikes near Cohagen, 1880, photo by L. A. Huffman, MHS PA 981-699
- FIG. 7.23 Ledger drawing, by White Bear, Cheyenne, 1885, MHS Mus. X61.16.03
- FIG. 7.24 Drawing of a Buffalo Hunt, by New Bear, Gros Ventre, 1884, Charles H. Barstow Collection, MSU Billings, 1930.59
- FIG. 7.25 Native American [Woodenlegs] drawing in ledger book, BBHC, Thomas Marquis Collection, PN.165.1.49