



TIMELINE OF AMERICAN WESTWARD EXPANSION



Beneath the glamour and romance of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show lay the irony and sadness of a two hundred year legacy of genocide. The following timeline is meant to highlight those factors which contributed to the growing expansion of the frontier and, as a result, the extinction of a majority of Native American tribes.

Pre-Colonial Day: Scholars estimate the number of Native Americans north of Mexico to be 10 to 12 million.

1622: The Powhatan Confederacy nearly wipes out the struggling Jamestown colony. Frustrated at the continuing conflicts, Nathaniel Bacon and a group of vigilantes kill off the Pamunkey Indians.

1636: In New England, Puritan forces annihilate the Pequots in a campaign whose intensity foreshadows the future of Native American populations.

1657: Employing Indian auxiliaries and a scorched-earth policy, the colonists nearly exterminate the Narragansetts, Wampanoags, and Nipmucks.

1754-1763: The French and Indian War. British soldiers and militias overwhelm the French and Indian allies and absorb all of Canada.

1763: The Proclamation of 1763 forbids settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains because the colonists do not want to protect settlers so far west.

1777: In the American War for Independence, many Indians east of the Mississippi side with the Crown since they are beginning to view colonial pioneers as a bigger threat than the British government. During the war, strong American forces penetrate the heart of Iroquois territory, leaving a wide swath of destruction in their wake.

1783: The Treaty of Paris ensures further conflict among settlers and Native Americans when the boundaries of the newly recognized United States are set at the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes.

1800: Shawnee chief Tecumseh forms a political confederation of several Native American tribes at Prophetstown to prevent further erosion of their lands. His confederacy is defeated at the Battle of Tippecanoe.

1803: Present-day Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa are bought by Thomas Jefferson from Napoleon for two cents an acre in the Louisiana Purchase Act.

1838: The Trail of Tears is established as fifteen thousand Cherokee are forced to march from Georgia to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). An estimated four thousand people—over 25 percent of the Cherokee nation—die during the march.

1845: The Independent Republic of Texas, which includes all of present-day Texas and half of New Mexico, is annexed.

1846: The U.S. government acquires present-day Washington, Oregon, and Idaho by agreement from Britain.

1848: In the Mexican Cession, the U.S. acquires present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico.

1865: Railroad expansion, the spread of European diseases like small-pox, new mining ventures, the killing off of the buffalo, and ever-increasing white demand for land continue to decimate the Native American population.

1876: Attracted by arable lands and rumors of gold in the Dakotas, the U.S. government opens a new war against what is left of Native American forces—a loose coalition forged by leaders such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse—culminating in the annihilation of five troops of General Custer's cavalry at Little Bighorn.

1881: The majority of Native Americans left are forced to accept reservation life.

1887: The Dawes Severalty Act imposes a system of individual land ownership upon many of the Indian tribes with the government selling off the surplus lands to white settlers for the presumed benefit of the tribes.

1890: The last major battle of U.S. and Indian forces occurs at Wounded Knee, in which casualties totals over two hundred Indians and 64 U.S. soldiers, effectively closing the American frontier for good.

The steady decline of the Indian population has reached a low point of 228,000.

1893: Frederick Jackson Turner publishes his "Turner Thesis: Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History," posing that "the true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West." (See page 11.)

(Material derived from: Foner, Eric and Garraty, John. The Reader's Companion to American History. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1991)