

Lesson 5: Historical Experiences 1865-1934

A.) Indian Destruction

- With Lee's surrender at Appomattox in 1865 (which was conducted with Ely S. Parker, a Seneca Indian and future Commissioner of Indian Affairs, at General Grant's side) the U.S. army was now free to put a greater emphasis on military campaigns in the west.
- While the South began the process of Reconstruction, generals and their armies began western campaigns whose goal in many instances was the pacification or outright destruction of the Native American nations of the west.

B. Battle of the Washita (1868)

- In November of 1868, Chief Black Kettle and his band of Southern Cheyenne are attacked near the Washita River near present day Cheyenne, OK by the U.S. 7th Cavalry lead by George Armstrong Custer.
- Black Kettle had been attacked before, in 1864 while camped at Sand Creek in southern Colorado Territory. The result of this attack is known today as the "Sand Creek Massacre." More than 100 Southern Cheyenne were killed by forces lead by Col. J.M. Chivington, prompting increased hostilities in the region, just as the Grattan Massacre had done ten years earlier.
- Black Kettle is this time killed the skirmish, in addition to nearly 100 Southern Cheyenne men, women, and children.

- This instance of violence is often erroneously referred to as a “massacre”, but the Battle of the Washita was no massacre. The Southern Cheyenne camped with Black Kettle had been guilty of theft, murder, and violations of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge signed in 1867. Custer was under orders to pursue them as combatants, so what happened in Southern Oklahoma can better be called an instance of “hard war.”
- Understanding violent episodes like the Battle of Washita are important to understanding the New Indian Story. Too often Native peoples are portrayed as wholly innocent victims of an American onslaught, incapable of defending themselves or their families. This is not true, and such a depiction underestimates the military prowess of the Cheyenne.

C. Battle of Little Bighorn (1876)