Westward Movement and Native Americans

Manifest Destiny was the belief that the United States was destined to expand from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. As a result of this belief, more people in the United States moved westward, and Native Americans suffered. Native American culture was negatively affected by the loss of their land, the decimation of the buffalo (their main source of food, shelter, and clothing), and the forced assimilation of children thorough boarding schools. The lesson below lists a number of important events that occurred in the 1800s in American relations with the Native Americans.

Indian Removal Act

The Indian Removal Act was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830. This act aimed at removing any Native Americans that lived in the lands east of the Mississippi River, and gave the president the power to negotiate treaties with Native Americans. While Andrew Jackson was president, he signed 94 treaties with Native American tribes, forcing many to relocate to areas west of the Mississippi River.

Worcester v. Georgia

Samuel Worcester, a minister from Vermont, was a close friend of the Cherokee leaders in Georgia and had been living with the Cherokee. The Georgia government saw how influential Worcester was and passed a law that prohibited white people from living within the Cherokee Nation without permission from the state. In 1832, the Supreme Court ruled in this case that Georgia did not have a constitutional right to force its laws on the Cherokee living within the state. Georgia ignored the Court's ruling, and President Jackson chose not to send federal troops to force Georgia into accepting the Court's decision. The Cherokee were eventually pressured into signing a treaty that gave up their land and moved them elsewhere. This led to the "Trail of Tears."

Trail of Tears

In the years that followed, President Jackson was harshly criticized for his lack of
support for the ruling in *Worcester v. Georgia* and for ordering U.S. troops to help in the actions that led to the Trail of Tears. In 1835, a small group of Cherokee were pressured into signing a treaty giving the Cherokee tribal land to the state of Georgia in return for $5 million. This treaty was not recognized by a large majority of Cherokee, who refused to leave their homes. In 1838, the U.S. government sent troops to force the Cherokee to move to what is now Oklahoma. Along the 1,000-mile route from Georgia to Oklahoma, over 4,000 Native Americans died due to disease, starvation, and exposure to cold weather. This event is referred to as the Trail of Tears.

**Bison Hunt**

During the mid to late 1800s, bison numbers grew close to extinction after the U.S. Army actively promoted their slaughter. The U.S. was trying to weaken the Native American population by eliminating their food source and forcing them onto reservations.

**Indian Appropriations Act**

In 1851, the U.S. government passed the Indian Appropriations Act, creating the first reservations for Native Americans. Native Americans fought against being relocated to these areas reservations, and the U.S. government and the Native Americans fought a series of wars known as the American Indian Wars. Following the defeat of many tribes, the Native Americans were forced to live on the reservations, where they then had to rely on the government for food and housing.

**Sand Creek Massacre**

The Sand Creek Massacre took place in southeastern Colorado on November 29, 1864. Colonel John Chivington attacked an encampment of Cheyenne and Arapaho near Sand Creek. Chivington led this attack as an act of revenge against Native Americans who had attacked white settlers in the area. Because Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle had sent many of his men to hunt, there were few people who could defend the camp when it was attacked. The Native Americans put up a white flag to indicate surrender, but Chivington ignored this action. Between 150 and 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho were killed, including elderly men, women, and children.

**Treaty of Fort Laramie**

In 1868, the Lakota tribe and the U.S. government signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie. This treaty gave the Lakota ownership of the Black Hills in South Dakota and Wyoming. In 1874, George Custer led an expedition into the Black Hills, and gold was discovered near what is now Custer, South Dakota. This started the Black Hills Gold Rush, and many people came to the area hoping to strike it rich.
In 1876, the Homestake deposit was found, and the town of Deadwood was established. Thousands of miners were on the Native Americans' territory, disregarding the treaty. This increased the tension that existed between the United States and the Native Americans.

**Red Cloud**

Red Cloud was a Lakota chief who led Native Americans in fighting against U.S. troops from 1866 to 1868 in a conflict known as Red Cloud's War. This war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Fort Laramie. In 1870, Red Cloud gave an important speech at the Cooper Union school in New York City in which he made an appeal to American citizens to oppose Native Americans being forced onto reservations. Below is an excerpt from his speech.

> When you first came we were very many, and you were few; now you are many, and we are getting very few, and we are poor. You do not know who appears before you today to speak. I am a representative of the original American race, the first people of this continent. We are good and not bad. The reports that you hear concerning us are all on one side. We are always well disposed to them. You are here told that we are traders and thieves, and it is not so. We have given you nearly all our lands, and if we had any more land to give we would be very glad to give it. We have nothing more. We are driven into a very little land, and we want you now, as our dear friends, to help us with the government of the United States.

—Red Cloud

Red Cloud eventually came to the conclusion that Native Americans could no longer successfully resist American expansion into the West, and he agreed to lead many of his people to a reservation.

**Quanah Parker**

Quanah Parker was a Comanche leader who fought against American settlement on Native American lands. In June 1874, he led warriors from several different Native American groups on an attack on Adobe Walls, a buffalo hunters' camp in the Texas panhandle. The camp was able to survive the attack, but Native Americans began to attack frontier settlements more and more after this defeat.

**Battle of Little Big Horn**

Also known as Custer's Last Stand, this battle took place in 1876. It was one of
the Native Americans’ last victories over U.S. troops. Chiefs Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse led over 2,500 warriors against 264 U.S. troops led by Lieutenant Colonel George Custer.

**Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce**

The Nez Perce lived in Oregon. In the late 1870s, they were forced to move to Idaho. In 1877, Chief Joseph led a group of Nez Perce through Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, hoping to reach freedom in Canada. Less than 50 miles from the border, U.S. troops surrounded the group, and Chief Joseph surrendered. As he surrendered, he said, "Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

**A Century of Dishonor**

In 1881, Helen Hunt Jackson published her book, *A Century of Dishonor*. In the book, Jackson details the injustices that the U.S. government inflicted upon the Native Americans. During its first 100 years as a country, the U.S. government broke treaties and forced Native Americans off their lands and onto reservations. Jackson's book brought attention to these inequities and influenced a reform movement in Native American policy.

**Dawes Severalty Act**

The Dawes Severalty Act was passed in 1887. Under this act, the U.S. government broke up the Native American reservations and gave Native American families homesteads. The families were required to live on the land for 25 years and were required to give up their Native American traditions. At the end of 25 years, the families would own the land and become U.S. citizens. As a result, Native Americans lost much of their land and were given land in the desert that was not good for farming.

**Wounded Knee**

In December of 1890, the last major clash between Native Americans and the U.S. occurred near Wounded Knee Creek on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The conflict is known as the Battle of Wounded Knee or the Wounded Knee Massacre. Prior to this event, the Lakota tribes began participating in a spiritual ceremony known as the "Ghost Dance." The Lakota believed that by participating in the Ghost Dance, all deceased Native Americans from past generations would return to Earth, and the white man would disappear. The Ghost Dance increased tension between white settlers and the Native Americans.

Following these developments, Chief Big Foot and some of his followers decided to travel from the Cheyenne Indian Reservation to the Pine Ridge Reservation so
he could join other Lakota tribe members. The group was intercepted by U.S. troops and told to surrender any weapons. During the surrender, one Lakota warrior's gun accidentally fired. In the chaos following the shot, soldiers and other warriors began to fire their guns, and many Native Americans began to flee. Both women and children were shot down as they ran to escape the fighting. By the time peace was restored, over 150 Native Americans were dead, including Chief Big Foot.