

ACTIVITY 1: MYSTERY

LESSON 17

Was the Californian Gold Rush of 1848 the Main Cause of Conflict Between Native and European Americans?

1-1

The Gold Rush began when gold was discovered in 1848 by James W. Marshall in Coloma, California.

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1-2

Before the Transcontinental Railroad, it took almost six months and cost \$1,000 to travel between California and New York. After the Transcontinental Railroad was completed, it cost \$150 and took one week.

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1-3

Whole indigenous societies were forced from their lands by gold seekers.

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1-4

By 1900, only 16,000 native Californians survived.

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An estimated 4,000 native children
were sold as slaves to settlers.

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'Because the Cherokees numbered
several thousand, their removal
to the West was planned to be in
gradual stages, but the discovery
of Appalachian gold within the
territory brought on a clamour for
their immediate wholesale exodus.'

Dee Brown, Chapter 1,

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

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'The white men of the United
States – who talked so much
of peace but rarely seemed to
practice it ...'

Dee Brown, Chapter 1,

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'During the autumn of 1838,
General Winfield Scott's soldiers
rounded them up and concentrated
them into camps. From the prison
camps they were started westward
to Indian Territory. On the long
winter trek, one of every four
Cherokees died from the cold,
hunger or disease.'

Dee Brown, Chapter 1,

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

“To justify these breaches of the “permanent Indian frontier”, the policy makers in Washington invented Manifest Destiny, a term which lifted land hunger to a lofty plane. The Europeans and their descendants were ordained by destiny to rule all of America’.

Dee Brown, Chapter 1,
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

When Europeans first landed on the shores of North America, they longed for land in the West. This brought them into direct conflict with the Native Americans who lived there. To begin with, a number of white settlers tried to make peace and coexist with the Indians, but in the end the quest for land, power, and wealth was too great and the white man forced the Native American Indians to leave their homes.

Greed and a desire for wealth and land destroyed centuries of Native American culture.

President Jackson referred to the Native Americans as the ‘Indian problem’. He believed they needed to be civilised and learn to live like the white men.

As an incentive for the moving of the native tribes, President Jackson guaranteed that the new Indian territory would have representation on Congress. This never happened.

On 28th May 1830, President Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act. It authorised him to give land west of the Mississippi to Indian tribes in exchange for their holdings in the East. The United States would 'forever secure and guarantee' this land to them and their 'heirs or successors', provide compensation for the improvements upon their Eastern lands, and provide assistance in their emigration to the West.

Newspapers made up extravagant success stories of people earning \$1,000 a day digging for gold. The reality was that gold mining was back-breaking work and many miners earned no more than \$3 a day. During 1849, the mines yielded millions of dollars' worth of gold, but this only went to a lucky few.

The American Civil War ended in 1865. Thousands of demobilised soldiers and freed slaves were looking for a new life and a fresh start. Moving West was the solution.

The people of the United States viewed their country as a shining example to all democratic people around the world.

Manifest Destiny was the belief that the European Americans were destined by a God-given duty to spread across the North American continent.

Politicians, military personnel and settlers felt it was their God-given right to take land from whoever stood in their way. They therefore believed that their treatment of the Native Americans was justified.

Many settlers believed that by moving West and across the 'Indian territory' they were doing God's will and were bringing Christianity and civilisation to the area.

The white settlers and the US government deceived the Native American tribes into signing false treaties. Most Native Americans could not read or write English.

In *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Dee Brown uses eye-witness accounts to tell the story of the Native American.

Dee Brown's book is unique because he uses Native American interpretations. Brown used the Sioux and Cheyenne terms of iron horses and wooden houses to describe trains and train cars. He was authentic to the history of the Native Americans.

In the early 1840s, stories began to circulate about how wonderful the far West was. Many of these stories were from missionaries who wanted more people to help convert the Native Americans to Christianity.

Some stories came from those who would benefit financially from new settlers.

In 1837, the United States experienced an economic depression. In the East, banks collapsed, people lost their savings and wages were cut by over 40%. Unemployment was on the rise.

In the mid-West, farmers were struggling. In the Mississippi Valley the price of wheat and corn had collapsed. Times were hard, and people were desperate for a fresh start.

Fur trappers described California as a place where the sun always shone and fruit grew everywhere. Oregon was described as a place with a never-ending supply of fur. Oregon's rivers were reported to be full of fish and the land was ripe for farming.

To the Native Americans, land was part of the circle of life. They did not own the land. They believed that land belonged to everybody.

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White settlers wanted land. They ridiculed the way of life of the Native Americans and considered them as savages and their beliefs as mere superstition. The Natives were an obstacle to attaining land and the settlers were prepared to use force to remove them.

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White settlers brought disease and once the Native Americans were forced on to reservations, measles, influenza and whooping cough spread widely. There was no medical attention available.

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In 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad was completed.

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Conflict between Native tribes and white Europeans began after the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492.

Settlers built upon the sacred hunting ground of the Native Americans and by 1890 only 1,000 buffalo remained of 50 million. The Native Americans had to rely upon government handouts as they had no means of supporting themselves.

‘They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land, and they took it.’

Dee Brown, Chapter 19,
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee.

‘Treat all men alike . . . give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who is born a free man should be contented when penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases. We only ask an even chance to live as other men live. We ask to be recognized as men. Let me be a free man . . . free to travel . . . free to stop . . . free to work . . . free to choose my own teachers . . . free to follow the religion of my Fathers . . . free to think and talk and act for myself.’

Dee Brown, Chapter 13,
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

‘To the Indians it seemed that these Europeans hated everything in nature – the living forests and their birds and beasts, the grassy glades, the water, the soil, the air itself.’

Dee Brown, Chapter 1,
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

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The Native Americans had thrived and prospered for centuries, long before Christopher Columbus set sail.

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From the 1870s, ranchers needed land on which to graze their cattle. The land they wanted was buffalo pasture.

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The railroad brought buffalo hunters. Many hunted buffalo for sport.

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The tipi was the traditional home of the Native Americans. It was made from 10–20 buffalo skins.

Arranged marriages took place in some Native American tribes, but most marriages were love matches. Women, children and the elderly were respected and valued members of the community.

In Chapter 2, Brown shares that the US army destroyed Navaho horses, livestock, crops and food stores. They also did not provide enough rations or supplies.

The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged people to move West. People were entitled to 160 acres of free land as long as they promised to farm that land for five years.

The Transcontinental Railroad forced the Native Americans from their land and destroyed their culture and way of life. As the railroad spread west, the Native Americans were forced to defend their land.