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8

Refugees, Removals, and Reservations

ENVIRONCID E IN THE AMERICAN WEST IN THE 19TH CENTURY

It [the peace Andrew Jackson imposed in Florida] is the peace of the great charnel house . . . the peace which reigned along the Andes when the remorseless Pizarro had spread desolation over South America—the peace which pervaded Holland when the merciless Duke of Alva had deluged her fertile fields and drenched the streets of her cities with the blood of her citizens.¹

Destroy their villages and ponies . . . kill or hang all warriors, and bring back the women and children.²

THE FIRST QUOTE is from an 1819 debate in the US House of Representatives. Defenders of Andrew Jackson's cross-border expedition against the Seminole in Spanish Florida argued that the general had at least brought peace to the region. Representative Storrs of New York, perhaps a descendent of Dutch settlers, sharply disagreed and compared Jackson's merciless sacking and burning of numerous Seminole villages to the inhumane campaigns of Pizarro and Alva, resurrecting the 16th-century Black Legend narrative. The second quote refers to the

orders that Custer received from his superior, General Sheridan, during the 1868–69 winter campaign against the Great Plains Cheyenne and the Arapaho.

Pillage, raids, and scorched earth marked 19th-century warfare in the West of North America as locals, refugees, colonists, and gold diggers contested control over the key resources of bison herds, horses, and guns, as well as gold and environmental infrastructure. The more powerful groups expanded into the Great Plains, taking control over such resources through trading and raiding. The weaker ones retreated into the mountainous regions between the Great Plains and the Pacific Coast, eking out a living through hunting and gathering, raiding, and agriculture where environmental conditions allowed. Further west still, the considerable indigenous populations along the Pacific Coast of North America collapsed rapidly as a result of violence, the gold rush, and disease.³ Some have labeled the escalating and retaliatory violence that characterized the 19th century and that caused the decimation of the indigenous American populations as genocide.⁴

By the mid-1880s, the surviving 243,000 indigenous North Americans had been confined to 187 reservations, overwhelmingly located west of the Mississippi River. For many Western indigenous Americans, the removal to the reserves was the second or even third time that they had become refugees. Warfare and climate change in the North and East, trade and fur wars in the Great Lakes and the Great Plains, and Spanish conquest and raids in the South, Southwest, and West already had displaced many from their homes and environmental infrastructure.

The general image of Western indigenous Americans as iconic hunters and gatherers may constitute the upstreaming of a postcontact state of crisis caused by the displacement and violence that had robbed them of the environmental infrastructure that had sustained their lives.⁵ In fact, many Western indigenous Americans were no longer even in their precontact environment. The Western indigenous Americans' experiences as refugees trying to make a living by any means possible is, therefore, important to emphasize.

A second theme of this chapter is to assess the extent to which the Western indigenous Americans constructed and maintained environmental

infrastructure, despite having been displaced relatively recently. A final inquiry involves ascertaining the degree to which the Western indigenous Americans' environmental infrastructure was an object, subject, and instrument of violence in the 18th and 19th centuries. An explicit focus on the consequences of war and displacement not only helps to explain the overexploitation of such environmental resources as beaver and buffalo but also highlights how capturing existing environmental infrastructure from others was a critical shortcut that enabled refugees and colonists to secure new lives and livelihoods. The appropriation of environmental infrastructure was extremely violent because it pitted refugees and migrants against established populations or other refugees. Moreover, the plight of the Western indigenous Americans also demonstrates that they were simultaneously victims and agents of history: they experienced social and environmental collapse, and reinvented themselves and their environment not once, but twice or even three times during the course of a century.

Western Indigenous Americas as Refugees

Nineteenth-century explorers encountered "besieged, dependent, and fearful . . . peoples" in the Great Basin west of the Great Plains.⁶ The indigenous Americans of the Great Basin were not an exception. All remaining indigenous North Americans were under siege, and most of the Western indigenous Americans had been displaced multiple times. They were refugees from war and conflict over crop land and hunting territories, water, fur, guns, horses, and slaves. They were victims of violent invaders: indigenous Americans, Europeans, or both. Yet, they were historical actors as well, having fled west and engaged in rebuilding communities and workable environments. During the 19th century, however, they were overtaken by a tsunami of total war and once again displaced to reservations, triggering yet another round of rebuilding and reinvention by those who survived.⁷

Except for the Southwestern indigenous Americans, the literature frequently depicted Western indigenous societies as archetypal (semi)nomadic hunter and gatherers who adapted to a challenging

semiarid or arid climate over the course of millennia. Many, however, only relatively recently had been displaced from various other environments. Southern and Southwestern indigenous Americans had been deeply scarred by Spanish violence in the 16th and 17th centuries, and during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Spanish soldiers subjected indigenous Californians to forced removals and violent raids for captives. The 18th-century indigenous Americans of Ohio similarly were refugees from violence in the Northeast: the Iroquois wars and settler violence. The iconic northern Great Plains bison hunters hailed from the Eastern Woodlands around the Great Lakes, and their equally iconic southern neighbors entered the grassy expanses from the west and south.

An environmentally deterministic argument underlays the classification of the Western indigenous Americans as hunter-gatherers: that the West simply was too arid for agriculture. Exceptions were few and far between, although precontact agriculture had been more common in the North American Southwest.⁸ The Texas panhandle in the southern Great Plains, for example, had sustained dryland maize well into the 15th century.⁹ Nevertheless, although the decline of Western indigenous American agriculture may have been related to climatic factors and to precontact violence rather than European invasion, the West's aridity did not impose a hunting and gathering lifestyle, *per se*.

The 1830s forced removals of the Southwestern indigenous Americans, including the Creek, the Cherokee, and the bulk of the Iroquois confederacy from the eastern part of North America completed a process of displacement that had begun much earlier. Huron and other survivors from the earlier Iroquois wars in the Northeast who fled west caused conflict deeper in the interior. The Great Lakes Dakota managed to defeat the encroaching Huron and their Algonquin allies in 1690, yet still moved further west. The displacement of the Dakota and other Sioux groups was partly a response to shifts in the fur trade as beaver hunting in the Eastern Woodlands became more contested and buffalo hunting on the Great Plains more attractive. But war and Iroquois western expansion were also major factors.¹⁰

The westward migrations of the Sioux in turn displaced the Omahas, Iowas, Missouri, and Poncas, among others.¹¹ After the mid-18th century,

Cree and Assiniboin bands moved toward the Great Plains; by the 1790s, the Assiniboin and the western Cree had reinvented themselves as horse-mounted buffalo hunters. In turn, the Salteaux moved into the areas in the Eastern Woodlands that had been vacated by the Cree.¹² The 19th-century Great Plains' buffalo hunting bands of the Comanche, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, southern Cheyenne, and Arapaho were all newcomers: none were indigenous to the region. The Comanche had been driven from southern Wyoming by the Sioux during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Kiowa, who originated from the headwaters of the Missouri, had been pushed south by the Cheyenne and the Arapaho. The Cheyenne and the Arapaho, in turn, had been edged out of Wisconsin and Minnesota by the Sioux.¹³ Many more Western indigenous Americans were displaced or otherwise affected by the Sioux and Comanche, who, along with their allies, created powerful empires in the Great Plains.¹⁴

The indigenous Americans of the Far West had been equally traumatized by conflict and displacement. The societies in the South and Southwest had experienced repeated Spanish invasions, including the utterly destructive Spanish-Pueblo Wars, as well as slave raids. Moreover, by the 19th century, the indigenous Californians' hunting and gathering lifestyle may have been more of an expedient strategy of desperation and improvisation than the result of an age-old adaption to a challenging natural environment. Spanish colonization broadcast violence deep into the interior of California and caused massive population displacement.¹⁵ The most direct impact of the Spanish conquest was experienced along the coast. The Chumash villages first came into contact with a Spanish expedition in 1769. The first mission was established there in 1772, followed by a Spanish fort in 1804. Disease killed many Chumash during the early mission period, when missionaries initiated forced resettlement in concentrated villages while indigenous groups fought one another.¹⁶

The indigenous villages in the interior of California effectively were refugee settlements.¹⁷ Spanish raiders pursued the indigenous Californians to replenish the populations of the Spanish missions on the coast. Most of the converted indigenous Americans residing at the missions

were captives. The impacts of the Spanish raids and the concentration of captives at missions are clearly visible in Californian's archaeological record. Many of the territory's 4,000–5,000 archaeological sites were occupied early in the contact period but soon abandoned as its inhabitants fled or were captured.¹⁸

As on the East Coast of North America, violence and displacement literally created space for invasive species, new ideas, and innovative practices. The adoption of the horse, which permitted even greater mobility for buffalo hunting, is one example. But horses also imposed limitations: they required good grazing and shelter, particularly during the winter, as they were vulnerable to extreme low temperatures.¹⁹ Refugee investment in productive environmental infrastructure may have been hindered by the perceived need to invest heavily in defensive fortifications, guns, and horses. Trauma and despair also may have rendered the displaced indigenous Americans and European settlers more likely to use violence to gain access to the environmental infrastructure of the societies they encountered. They may have become more ruthless in the exploitation of any resources that would help them to survive and rebuild, be it hunting beaver or buffalo to acquire guns and horses, or raiding for livestock, food, or slaves.

Hunting and Gathering as Improvisation

Various Great Plains hunters, including Dakota-Sioux groups, had been sedentary farmers when they lived further east, but transformed themselves into specialized buffalo hunters during the 18th and 19th centuries. Nomadic buffalo hunting was heavily, but not entirely, dependent on the introduction of the horse, a postcontact innovation. Horses enabled a more mobile lifestyle; they could pull much larger loads than the dogs used before the equines' introduction.²⁰ The history of the Sioux demonstrates that the sharp distinction between (nomadic) hunter gatherers and (sedentary) agriculturalists is overdrawn. The mid-17th-century Eastern Sioux were less mobile than their Great Plains Sioux cousins, even as they were conventionally described as hunter-gatherers. Men hunted while women tapped sugar maples and gathered wild rice. The

women may also have grown corn. Moreover, wild rice was not always “wild;” in some cases it may have been cultivated and in more recent times even considered the cultivator’s property rather than a free or communal resource. After the rice harvest, the Eastern Sioux seasonally moved into the forests and river valleys of northeastern Minnesota to hunt elk and deer for the duration of the winter. In March–April, they returned to their villages to subsist on stored food supplemented with freshly caught water fowl and fish. They also hunted buffalo east of the Mississippi and stored dried meat and wild rice mixed with tallow and other foods. If they kept moving between their main village and various seasonal camps, resources usually were plentiful.²¹

In the early 18th century, the Sioux migrated from the Eastern Woodlands to the Great Plains west of the Mississippi River and increasingly came to rely on hunting buffalo. Yet, early 19th-century expeditions observed corn or bean fields near Sioux “camps” even as they described the Sioux as consummate hunters. Euro-American observers also noted that the larger settlements of the previous era had given way to smaller residential bands: larger villages are considered to be more typical for farmers while hunter-gatherers tended to live in smaller groups.²² Moreover, the successful adoption of small-scale gardening by the Western Sioux in the 1880s (after they had been removed to reservations) was facilitated by their history of crop cultivation along the Missouri River before arriving in the Great Plains in the early 1800s. The Brulé Sioux had long continued to grow corn, and the name of the Minneconjou Sioux means “planters beside the stream.”²³ Nomadic bison hunting thus was not a time-honored Plains’ indigenous American tradition, but an 18th-century “improvisation.”²⁴

Similarly, after the Pawnee acquired horses in the 18th century, they disinvested from agriculture. While men and women alike had engaged in crop cultivation, the women now tilled small one- to three-acre fields in the soft soils along rivers or creeks. After weeding the crop, Pawnee bands temporarily abandoned their villages for the summer hunt. They returned to their villages for the harvest, stocking the winter stores in pits. Some Pawnees maintained or restored crop cultivation and storing practices into the early 19th century, as illustrated by an 1820s account

that a party of European hunters had only survived a grueling winter because they had discovered a cache of stored corn at a Pawnee village. When the Pawnee residents returned to their village, the grateful hunters compensated them for the corn that they had eaten.²⁵

The emphasis on the Great Plains indigenous Americans' dependence on bison overlooks both the past and the continued importance of agriculture and "wild" plants. Before the advent of European trade and the introduction of the horse, a drier climate caused a shift to greater reliance on buffalo hunting, especially in the western parts of the region, while agriculture remained more important in the eastern parts.²⁶

The Mandan and Hidatsa agricultural complex on the Great Plains long predated the introduction of the horse. By the late 18th century, the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on the rich Upper Missouri bottomlands were the most northern agriculturalists. Employing a fast-ripening flint maize, they used the same fields repeatedly, preparing them with fire and growing their corn on small mounds. Among the 19th-century Hidatsa, the individual who undertook the heavy task of clearing a plot to make a field became its owner. Women owned their own farm plots that were inheritable in the maternal line. Agriculture had been much more widespread on the Great Plains during the 10th to the early 17th centuries. Archaeological research in the Western Canadian Red River region near today's Lockport, Manitoba, unearthed bell-shaped underground food storage caches, as well as pottery, hoes, grinding tools, and corn kernels dating to the 14th century. Climatic cooling around 1500 shortened growing seasons and pushed agriculture south.²⁷ The phenomena may have displaced some of the Northern Great Plains and Eastern Woodlands indigenous Americans and scattered them southward; along the way, some shifted to hunting, gathering, and raiding.

The history of such Great Basin groups as the Shoshone, Paiute, and Ute west of the Great Plains demonstrates the dramatic impact of population displacement. The Ute and the Shoshone were not indigenous to the Great Basin, having originated from further east. These groups repeatedly adapted to very different environments. Along with other indigenous Americans in the Great Basin, they not only engaged in hunting and gathering but also actively managed plants and entire ecosystems

through burning, clearing, pruning, coppicing, tilling, and transplanting. The Shoshone, Paiute, and Ute practiced small-scale cropping. Except for the Southern Paiute, who reportedly engaged in small-scale horticulture in 1776 and in 1844, the chronology of these different pursuits is not entirely clear.²⁸

It is similarly difficult to determine if the Shoshone added cultivation to their survival strategies after they had been driven off the Great Plains into the Great Basin. The Great Basin indigenous Americans gathered piñon nuts, mesquite, agave, yucca, and at least 161 kinds of small seeds. The assumption that hunting and gathering in the Great Basin was the “natural” subsistence strategy is problematic. Agriculture may have been marginal and limited, but it was practiced in all the major groups, including the Southern Paiute. Several Western Shoshone groups in central Nevada sowed “wild” seeds near springs, including lamb’s quarters and Indian rice grass, after clearing the vegetation with fire. They also used fire and coppice on willow and skunk bush sumac to produce straight stems for basketry. The Death Valley Shoshone heavily pruned mesquite to optimize the production of seed pods and firewood. The evidence of agricultural practices suggests yet again that it was not necessarily environmental conditions that led them to specialize in hunting and gathering. Moreover, planting and tending irrigated “wild” plants, including agave, had long been known in the Great Basin. Agave, or American century plant, was a staple (and a stored food) for many of the Southwestern indigenous Americans, including the Apache, Comanche, and Ute.²⁹ The Southern Great Plains societies, in particular the Comanche who dominated the region in the 18th and 19th centuries, found themselves in a much more favorable environment for horse-mounted hunting because of the higher temperatures and the less severe winters south of the Arkansas River. Yet, they, too, were not simply nomadic hunter-gatherers. Trading (for corn and other foods as well as guns and horses) and raiding (for horses and captives) were as important to the Comanche as bison hunting, and they spent most of the winter months in large villages to which they returned every year.³⁰

The Gold Rushers referred to the indigenous Californians as “diggers” as a means of evoking images of savagery: they purportedly lived

hand to mouth, digging up roots.³¹ California's indigenous societies still are seen to have relied more heavily on wild plants than any other indigenous North American group, except those in the Great Basin.³² On one level, the mid-19th-century label reflected the dependency on digging roots, however, the practice may have been a recent invention resulting from war and displacement. On another level, the term "diggers" served as an ideological and legal discourse to legitimize the alienation of land and environmental resources by ruthless gold prospectors, settlers, land speculators, and officials.³³ The indigenous Californians, however, lived in hamlets and villages that in the 19th century appeared as fixed as those of the indigenous peoples of the Northeast.³⁴

Still, "native life" had been deeply affected by Spanish colonization. The 15,000 indigenous American Christians living at the Californian missions in 1834 would have constituted almost 20 percent of the 80,000 indigenous Americans remaining after the deadly 1830s epidemic. Almost one-fifth of the indigenous Californians would have been nominal Christians who had at one time resided at a Spanish mission. Given that the Christianization of the indigenous Californians was steeped in violence, it is legitimate to question the extent to which they voluntarily abandoned their previous lifestyles and beliefs. The main point, however, is that they cannot simply be regarded as traditional hunters and gatherers. Moreover, missionized indigenous Californians had an impact beyond their numbers because they interacted with friends and relatives in the interior. Flight from the missions was common, and missionized indigenous Americans and their ideas penetrated the interior even before larger numbers of refugees returned to the interior villages after the Mexican authorities freed them from the missions. Up to 10 percent of all Christian indigenous Americans fled the missions permanently, and many more ran away for shorter or longer periods of time. One suggestive example of the extent to which missionized indigenous Americans had an impact is the spread of invasive weeds that were "domesticated" in the interior of California. Interviewees told ethnographers in early 20th-century central California that wild oats (*Avena fatua*), a highly valued food crop, had "always" grown in the area. But wild oat is an Old World weed that must have been introduced with

grain seed at the Spanish missions. Other Californian invasive weeds may also have originated as escapees from Spanish mission fields, perhaps carried into the interior by human refugees.³⁵

Not by Nature: Western Indigenous Americans and Environmental Infrastructure

Indigenous hunters had a major impact on the continent's fauna and contributed to the demise of the continent's large mammals, including the buffalo.³⁶ They also deeply shaped the New World's flora by the use of fire.³⁷ The indigenous Americans of the Pacific Northwest are often depicted as typical gatherers who lived off plants that "just grow by themselves."³⁸ Yet, they subjected 100 plant species or closely related groups of species to "some form of management associated with their maintenance or productivity" and engaged in the "cultivation of landscape." The list of plant resources that Pacific Northwestern indigenous Americans "sustained" included seaweed, 2 fungi species, 4 species of fern, 13 species of conifers, and 12 tree species, including yellow cedar, lodge pole and ponderosa pine, Rocky Mountain and big leaf maple, paper birch, and hazelnut.³⁹

Pacific Northwestern indigenous Americans also managed berry bushes with fire and pruning, and they widely used and harvested at least 60 species in large quantities. They dried and stored the berries underground and berry remains are well-represented at archaeological village sites.⁴⁰ Thousands of trees in the Northwest show evidence of human use: sustainable bark harvesting left scars on lodgepole and ponderosa pines along the coast and red cedars at the Indian Heaven huckleberry site in Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Washington. The scars on the red cedars date as far back as three centuries.⁴¹

American settlers admired the open landscapes of Vancouver Island and elsewhere in British Columbia, which they regarded as natural savannas. But, in fact, the Garry Oak savanna, which was covered with Cama meadows and fern glades, was the product of centuries of burning by the indigenous Salish. European observers in 1842 similarly considered the Springback clover (*Trifolium wormslioidii*) expanses near Fort

Victoria to be wild and natural, but they very likely were carefully managed by the local Songhee. Indigenous Americans managed such important staple root plants as the ubiquitous Cama (*Camassia quamash*) and Wapato or swamp potato (*Sagittaria latifolia*) through landscape clearing, weeding, and selective harvesting.⁴² European settlers discovered that Camas provided excellent fodder for their cattle, rendering the indigenous American staple highly vulnerable to foraging livestock. The destruction of the southern Vancouver Island Cama harvest by settler cattle factored into the outbreak of the 1877 Nez Perce war.⁴³

Indigenous Californians practiced landscape burning to create a more open landscape and to manage vegetation. They especially subjected the brushy or chaparral areas to fire management.⁴⁴ Indigenous Americans also shaped the grass savannas of the Great Plains by fire. Regular burning favored such highly nutritious short grasses as Buffalo grass (a staple for the buffalo) and reduced the spread of less palatable long grasses and forbs.⁴⁵ Landscape burning was also used to move game. During the late summer, the Blackfeet and other Great Plains groups set fire to open grasslands to force the buffalo herds toward their winter pastures in the foothills, where they had their winter camps.⁴⁶

Seasonal migrations usually occurred between sites with environmental infrastructure. Neither the Great Plains nor the Pacific Coastal indigenous Americans were truly nomadic. The Great Plains indigenous Americans had “favorite” winter camps, suggesting that they returned to the same locations repeatedly.⁴⁷ Northwestern Pacific indigenous Americans engaged in a seasonal pattern of movement to make optimal use of the resources available in different locations, for example fish along the coast or rivers, as well as lowland winter quarters and upland summer camps. The relatively predictable seasonal migration pattern involved a few select and fixed places that were proprietary: families typically returned to the same summer camps, where they carefully managed their own berry patches.⁴⁸ In the North Pacific Coast, individuals or groups owned specific fishing sites.⁴⁹ Particularly favorable hunting sites in California and elsewhere sometimes were also owned, although the practice was localized and dependent on the presence of such “improvements” as game fences.⁵⁰ Northern Great Plains bison

hunters, including the Cree and Assiniboiné, drove bison herds into elaborate hunting pounds made with brushwood where the animals could be killed in large numbers.⁵¹ On the Northwest Pacific Coast and in California, locations with “wild” plants were also sometimes exclusionary rather than open access.⁵²

Overwhelmingly, indigenous Americans, including hunter-gatherers, lived in permanent fixed abodes, framed by poles and covered by wood, bark, reed, earth, or stone. Dwellings required regular repair and maintenance, and they were occupied for at least part of the year. Many groups used more than one type of dwelling. The indigenous populations of the Missouri River Valley lived in multifamily, earth-covered lodges in villages during the farming season, and in hide-covered conical tepees, or tipis, when hunting buffalo.⁵³ In the (semi)arid West of North America, where protection against the summer heat was a priority, underground houses were common. Pit lodges provided coolness in scorching summers and warmth during freezing winters.⁵⁴ The English explorer Sir Francis Drake described such a pit house dwelling in 1571 in California’s Bay Area.⁵⁵

Buffalo hunters on the Great Plains used mobile homes consisting of pole frames covered by buffalo hides that could be transformed into drag sleds drawn by dogs or horses. The tepees were elaborate productions made of treated buffalo hides that were sewn together and kept the occupants warm even during the coldest weather. The mobility of such key environmental infrastructure allowed the Plains hunters to follow the migratory buffalo herds.⁵⁶

All Western indigenous Americans depended on food stores to survive seasons of scarcity and lean years. As elsewhere, food stores were concentrated at settlements, and dwellings often doubled as food storages. The 19th-century indigenous American fishing communities on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands preserved large quantities of food during the summer months.⁵⁷ Societies in central California and the Gulf of Mexico region stored food in large baskets placed on a stone or wooden platform.⁵⁸ The Sioux preserved food, including fish, meat, and a variety of wild and domesticated plants and fruits.⁵⁹ For the Great Plains indigenous Americans, dried meat and pemmican were key food

sources during the winter that they kept in their tents and transported on their travois.⁶⁰ The Northwestern Pacific indigenous Americans, who relied on a large-scale “storage economy” that dated back over three millennia, placed their food reserves in wooden boxes in their plank houses or their pit lodges.⁶¹ The Yavapai of Arizona preserved food in baskets and pots in the caves where they wintered.⁶² Seasonal migratory movements and raids encouraged hiding food stores. Caves or crevices were popular for food storage in the drier climates. Subterranean, well-camouflaged storage pits and other hidden food stores were also common.⁶³

Stored food was not ready-made manna from heaven. To the contrary, food for winter or dry season consumption had to be painstakingly processed and stored, requiring major investments of time, labor, and knowledge. Indigenous Americans often preserved food in pots and baskets.⁶⁴ In the more humid regions, maize had to be carefully dried over a fire or on drying racks before it could be safely stored. Fish was also dried.⁶⁵ The Great Plains’ pemmican consisted of dried meat mixed with melted fat and marrow to which berry or fruit paste was added. Preparing pemmican was laborious and complicated, but it produced a compact and high-energy food that when packed in a rawhide container and properly stored could be preserved for several years, although it usually was consumed within one.⁶⁶

Indigenous Californians’ acorn staple was an abundant natural resource, but it was not naturally digestible. Containing high levels of tannic acid, acorns required laborious processing before they yielded a safe and nutritious food. After being ground with a mortar and pestle, acorns were cooked with hot stones or boiled in water to remove the tannic acid. Processing enough acorn to provide half of the daily dietary calories for a family of four took up to five hours per day. Indigenous Californians relied more heavily on stored food than either the Plateau indigenous Americans to the north or the Great Basin indigenous Americans to the east, yet their food stores sustained them for longer periods than even the Northwestern Coastal indigenous Americans. The elaborate acorn processing and their granary technology rendered

the Californian indigenous Americans sedentary and able to sustain an unusually high population density for nonagriculturalists.⁶⁷

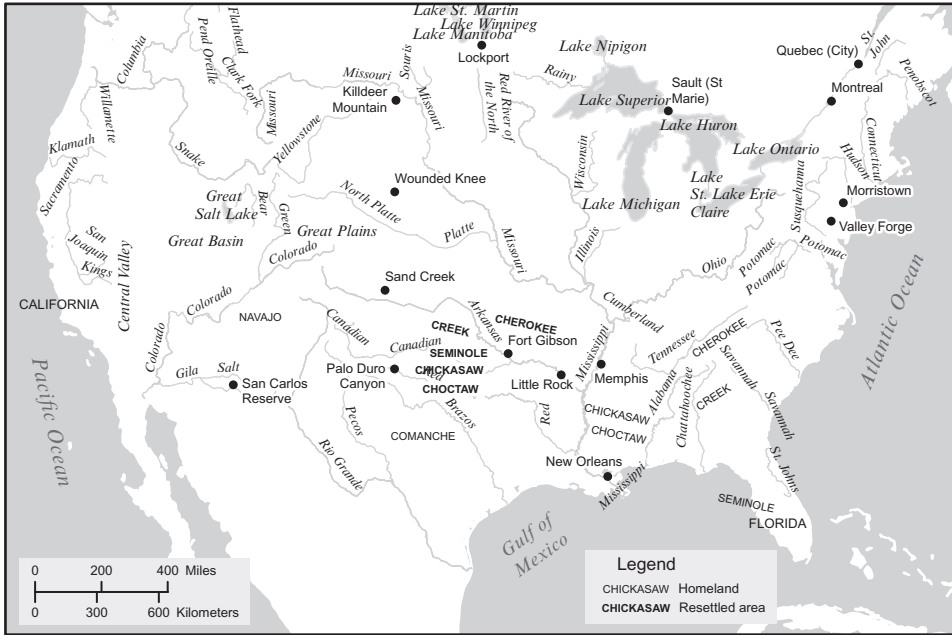
Indigenous American Refugees and War

At times, the westward displacement of indigenous Americans led to cooperation, as evidenced by the 18th-century “multi-ethnic” villages of the Great Lakes’ Pays d’en Haut. But desperate refugees also clashed with one another and with their host communities, leading to further displacement deeper into the interior prior to direct European contact. In large measure, attempts to gain or maintain control over and access to environmental infrastructure was the driving factor of violence. Refugees who had been displaced from their lands faced enormous challenges in adapting to and shaping the environments where they sought safety. The obstacles were higher still for war refugees weakened by disease and the long westward treks during which they carried only what they could save from their burning villages. Until they constructed new homes and produced or gathered food, rebuilt food stores, and constructed new tools, the refugees were exposed to the elements, as well as to hunger, thirst, and disease. The process of clearing vegetation and constructing homes and fields was enormously labor and time intensive, even with iron tools.⁶⁸ New iron tools could only be acquired through trading or raiding, and trading required furs, hides, or other valuable items. In migrating from the Eastern Woodlands to the Great Plains west of the Mississippi River, the Dakota successfully reinvented themselves as buffalo hunters. Adaptation was slow, however, and often exacted a terrible price: the Dakota population declined from an estimated 38,000 people in 1650 to 25,000 people in 1780.⁶⁹ Although Western Sioux groups migrated west to the Great Plains in the early 1700s, it was only by the 1770s—three generations later—that the Western Sioux emerged as horse-mounted buffalo hunters.⁷⁰

By the mid-1700s, the Ute and their Comanche allies, who were refugees from the north, dominated the New Mexico perimeter. With the spoils and slaves acquired through raids, they purchased horses, guns,

gun powder, and other trade goods. The new wealth and military strength allowed the Ute to consolidate into larger, more powerful groups, and Ute and Comanche raids displaced villagers along the Rio Grande, including Apache agriculturalists who abandoned their adobe homes and cornfields to seek refuge at Spanish settlements. Faced with the raiding, the Navajos retreated into the mountains. Paiute and Shoshone groups also fled their homes. The Comanche settled in abandoned Apache villages, easing their transition to the Great Plains environment, while the Ute continued their seasonal migrations between the plains and the mountains.⁷¹

Early in the Spanish colonial period, most of the postcontact groups were cast as hunter gatherers and at best even the (Western) Apache, who engaged in crop cultivation (maize, amaranth, squash, beans), were depicted as marginal agriculturalists. The indigenous Americans' dietary dependence on domesticates may have been limited, but it was significant—an estimated 25 percent for the Western Apache. The elderly and children who remained in the villages when the adult men and women left for seasonal hunting, gathering, trading, and raiding expeditions, cultivated the fields, and after the harvest, the villagers consumed the maize harvest on the spot, storing only a small portion as seed.⁷² By the early 1700s, assisted and inspired by Pueblo refugees in their midst, Apache groups engaged in small-scale irrigated agriculture while living in flat-roofed houses.⁷³ In the long run, violence and displacement turned Apache groups away from agriculture and toward a more mobile livelihood that was increasingly based on raiding as they were pushed out of the valleys and, subsequently, the Great Plains.⁷⁴ Apache raiding in turn displaced others, including the Pawnees and the Wichita.⁷⁵ The competition between the Comanche and the Apache over the key environmental resources in the Great Plain's river valleys was a major factor in these changes. The Comanche coveted the river valleys for the shelter, water, grazing, and forage they needed for their winter villages. The Apache villages proved highly vulnerable to the Comanche war parties that destroyed their homes and burned their corn fields. Displacing the Apache also left the Comanche in control of extensive trade routes to exchange bison products, horses, guns, and food.⁷⁶



MAP 8.1. North America during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Competition for horses, guns, and bison intensified conflict on the Northwestern Plains during the 18th and 19th centuries.⁷⁷ Around 1700, the Shoshone, who had fled north, acquired horses from the south. Horses provided the Shoshone with increased mobility: they could transport and accumulate more material goods. In addition to facilitating the hunt, horses gave the Shoshone an advantage in conflicts with their northern neighbors. To keep their horses healthy, however, the Shoshone also had to relocate to different seasonal camps more often, and they had to be more selective in choosing winter camps. Moreover, neighbors seeking to acquire their own mounts increasingly turned to horse raiding. The escalating insecurity led to more cohesive bands for protection.⁷⁸

Early in the 18th century, the newly horse-mounted Shoshones and their Crow allies dominated the Northwestern Great Plains. During the 1740s–80s, however, the Blackfeet and their allies replaced them as the dominant power because they had better access to guns through the

Cree and Assiniboiné. In contrast, Mexican traders from the south supplied the Shoshone with little or no firearms. The violence and the migrations provide the context for the devastating 1781 smallpox epidemic that may have killed two-thirds of all the indigenous Americans in the Great Plains region. The epidemic struck the Blackfeet, Cree, and Assiniboiné, but was especially devastating in the larger concentrated settlements of the Hidatsa and Mandan farmers.⁷⁹ The decline of the Hidatsa and Mandan, in turn, may have facilitated the rising dominance of the Great Plains horse-mounted buffalo hunters.⁸⁰

During the precontact period, the allied Cree and Assiniboiné inhabited the Eastern Woodlands north of Lake Superior, fishing the lakes and hunting caribou and moose during the winter. They became middlemen for the Hudson Bay Company fur trade in the 1670s, plying the lakes and rivers with their canoes and obtaining firearms through their trade activities. After the mid-18th century, Cree and Assiniboiné bands migrated toward the Great Plains. By the 1790s, the Assiniboiné and the Western Cree had reinvented themselves as horse-mounted Great Plains buffalo hunters.⁸¹ By 1800, fortified by a steady supply of guns obtained through their Cree and Assiniboiné allies, the Blackfeet increasingly drove the Shoshone and the Crow from the Northwestern Plains. The poorly armed Shoshone refugees resorted to raiding from hideouts in the mountainous margins of the Plains. Although an 1801 smallpox epidemic largely bypassed the Blackfeet, Cree, and Assiniboiné, it decimated the hard-pressed Crow, who had been weakened and displaced by the incessant Blackfeet attacks.⁸² Relations between the allied Cree and Assiniboiné on the one hand and the Blackfeet and their allies on the other, however, soured during the first half of the 19th century and became increasingly violent as the former lost their control over the trade, and buffalo herds retreated west.⁸³ Initially, the huge bison herds on the Great Plains must have seemed like a bounty from the skies to those displaced by war and climate change, especially as access to the mobile resource was difficult for any single group to control. But as competition for the bison herds increased, bison hunting morphed from a source of salvation into a weapon of war.⁸⁴

War and Settler Conquests in the 19th Century

During the last phase of the conquest in 19th-century North America, frontier warfare focused on displacing indigenous Americans, rather than enslaving, subjugating, or exploiting them. Settler communities considered the remaining indigenous Americans in the interior to be a threat and an obstacle to further European colonization. During the 1830s and 1840s, the strategy was simply to move the Eastern indigenous Americans out West across the Mississippi River into “Indian Country,” in the process clearing out most of the East for white settlement. With the acquisition of US territory in the West after the US–Mexican War, and the subsequent US expansion west of the Mississippi, the policy shifted. Instead, the indigenous Americans in the West were coerced into reservations to open more land for European settlement.

The Forced Removals of the Eastern Indigenous Americans

President Thomas Jefferson adopted a policy of forced removal aimed at domesticating and civilizing the indigenous peoples by concentrating them on reservations and converting them to agriculture. The policy also would free up more land for white settlers.⁸⁵ The forced removals west of the Mississippi affected 92 percent of the Eastern indigenous Americans, and the few that remained rarely inhabited their home environments.⁸⁶ Because the Eastern indigenous Americans generally had sided with the British during the American War of Independence and the new US government saw itself as the rightful owner of all former British territories, the US liberally laid claim to the indigenous American territories on the East Coast, including Creek territories. During the 1780s, colonist and livestock encroachment on Creek lands triggered Creek raids. The publication of survey maps whet settlers’ and speculators’ appetites for indigenous American farmlands, which often were explicitly marked as fertile on the maps. In 1795, corrupt Georgia state representatives sold millions of acres of lands that had been earmarked by treaty as exclusive “Indian Territory.”⁸⁷ During the War of 1812,

various Creek leaders allied with the Red Sticks and the Seminole again supporting the British against the US forces. Villages, fields, granaries, and livestock were the main targets of destruction for the belligerents. After their 1814 defeat, many Red Stick rebels fled to the Florida Seminole towns that continued to serve as safe havens for indigenous American rebels and escaped slaves.⁸⁸ Comprised of an amalgam of first-, second-, or third-generation indigenous American war refugees from further north, escaped slaves, and free blacks, the new communities built by the Seminoles in Florida were beyond the boundaries of the US territory. In 1810 and 1811, Georgia militia men attempted to annex Florida but failed, burning down Seminole villages in the process. In 1817, during the First Seminole War, Andrew Jackson and his army of regulars, militia, and allied Creek pillaged and torched numerous Seminole settlements, disregarding international borders and forcing the inhabitants to hide in the swamps. Debating Jackson's transborder actions in the US House of Representatives, Representative Storrs of New York accused Jackson of having flaunted international law and the US Constitution. He ridiculed the argument of the general's defenders that the bloody transborder campaign had brought peace to the troubled border region. Representative Rhea of Tennessee disagreed: Jackson's actions were justified because they were directed at indigenous American groups and thus did not require a declaration of war by Congress. Rhea further argued that the Seminole were in fact refugee Creek (i.e., US subjects) who had raided the US from Spanish territory. The House eventually decided not to censor Jackson, and after the US government annexed Florida in 1818, the army drove the Seminole onto a reservation. Faced with starvation, many Seminole did not survive the first winter. The Seminole rebelled in 1835 and a guerilla war continued into 1858. In 1835 and 1836, Seminole raids on settlers in northern Florida displaced thousands of colonists and planters who sought sanctuary at army forts and in fortified villages, where they subsisted on US government rations. To force the remaining Seminole to surrender for deportation to lands west of the Mississippi, US troops systematically burned Seminole crop fields, villages, dwellings, and the property that the soldiers could not carry. The soldiers also captured or killed any livestock

they encountered, causing hunger and illness among their opponents. In 1840, the army shifted from waging war only in the winter (when temperatures were lower) to campaigning in what was known as the hot summer “sickly season.” Army losses due to such diseases as malaria mounted dramatically, but the soldiers persisted because the Seminole had used the summer respites in the fighting to grow crops in well-hidden fields. Lieutenant Colonel William Harney, a ruthless proponent of scorched earth, hung Seminole prisoners, raped and murdered Seminole girls, and sadistically killed any animal, domestic or wild, that crossed his path. His actions did not negatively impact his career, nor did he change his ways. A general in the 1850s, he led a massacre of Sioux men, women, and children.⁸⁹

The best-known forced removals concern those of the southeastern Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole. The forced migrations of such “Northern” indigenous Americans as the Shawnee, Delaware, (Huron-)Wyandot, and Potawatomis have received much less attention. All, however, were victims and refugees of ethnic cleansing by the US government, state authorities, local militias, and settler mobs (the last two were often difficult to distinguish from one another). At the same time, the indigenous Americans maintained a level of control shaping when, how, and where they moved, despite the severe constraints. They were pioneers who settled new environments in the West, under conditions that were often even more challenging than those faced by the early European colonists at Jamestown and Roanoke. The latter arrived on ships with supplies and tools, whereas most of the Eastern indigenous Americans walked for hundreds of miles with little more than they could carry.⁹⁰

The 17th-century Iroquois Beaver Wars had pushed the Shawnee south from the Great Lakes region and the Delaware west, with some bands dispersing to seek safety at Creek and Susquehanna towns. During the American Revolutionary War, some groups crossed the Mississippi to the West, with Shawnee groups establishing agricultural villages near St. Louis. Both the Shawnee and the Delaware moved even further west in the 1820s. Like the Delaware and the Shawnee, the Potawatomis did not migrate in a single group but in smaller bands. In 1830,

there were 30 Potawatomi villages around Lake Michigan with more located in southern Michigan and Indiana. Feeling threatened by incoming settlers, the villagers packed up and moved further west, exploiting family, trade, and missionary networks to ease travel and resettlement. In the fall of 1838, settler militia men destroyed various Potawatomi villages in Indiana and marched the 800 inhabitants at gunpoint over almost 700 miles to the Osage River. Three hundred forced migrants fell sick and 40 (mostly children) died during the two-month ordeal.⁹¹

Treaties with the US government forced the Southwestern indigenous Americans to move west of the Mississippi during the 1830s and 1840s. The treaties stipulated that the government would pay for the removal, including providing food during and after the removal as well as transport (wagons, carts, and steamboats), annuities, hunting equipment, farm implements (including plows), and land in the West. During the early removals, the US government employed private contractors to supply transportation and rations, which often arrived after delays that resulted in spoiled food and overloaded wagons and steamboats. One of the overloaded steamboats sank with a loss of over 300 indigenous American lives, making the forced migrants terrified of steamer travel. Moreover, the packed steamboats and the overcrowded assembly and transit camps at Little Rock and Memphis were incubators of such deadly diseases as cholera and dysentery. Traveling in groups of around 1,000 persons each, the forced migrants, at best, were on the trail for two to three months. Delays at transit camps, however, could add months to the travel schedule. Smaller groups that traveled on their own, choosing their own routes and camping and hunting along their way, would take even longer. All, however, were exposed to freezing cold during winter travel or dreadful epidemics if they traveled in the hot summer "sickly season," which often caused a high death toll.⁹²

Early in 1831, the first group of 1,000 poorly provisioned Choctaw traveled west but ran into blistering winter weather after crossing the Mississippi, and their rations ran out. Ox wagons from the government fort at Little Rock met subsequent groups after they crossed the river. But Little Rock's transit camp lacked enough shelter for everyone who

was en route to the Red River resettlement area. Many fell ill and died along the way. After the bad experience with winter travel, subsequent groups tried to avoid the cold winter months, but summer travel exposed them to cholera in the hot and humid Mississippi Valley. By early January 1833, over 3,300 Choctaw had arrived at their new Red River homeland. Another 700 who arrived in February made their own arrangements to settle in Texas. Most of the Choctaw, however, remained in the East, and it took until 1838 for the majority to be resettled west of the Mississippi. Some remained in their old territory until 1847.⁹³

Violence and insecurity plagued the Creek villages in the remains of their eastern homeland in early 1830s. With the knowledge and cooperation of local magistrates, unscrupulous traders and settlers burned or occupied Creek homes and crop lands, and plundered their corn stores. Few Creek farmers dared to plant crops, resulting in food shortages and leaving the 23,000 Creek ill prepared for the removals. The first group left their homeland in December 1834 in the middle of a severe winter, traveling on foot, by wagon, and by steamer via Memphis and Little Rock to Fort Gibson in the Western Creek Agency. Only 469 of 630 Creek survived the grueling three-month exodus. Fears and tensions erupted in open war in the Creek homeland in 1836, resulting in the US Army moving in and burning more homes, crops, and possessions. Soldiers rounded up the resisters and their families, and crammed them first into detention camps and next onto steamers headed for New Orleans, where they again were placed in camps. Inadequate rations and crowded conditions invited dysentery, diarrhea, cholera, and fevers, decimating their numbers before they were deported west. Two more large groups were sent west via Memphis, filling rudimentary transit camps far above capacity as 13,000 people were packed together. Ten thousand Creek were delivered to the Fort Gibson camp during the dead of winter in 1836. The families of almost 800 Creek fighters who agreed to assist the 1836 US Army campaign against the Seminole in Florida were temporarily allowed to remain in their original territory in Alabama, where they were guarded by soldiers after individuals described by an army lieutenant as “marauders” pillaged and burned their homes. The use of the word “marauders” is significant because

marauding, that is unauthorized pillaging, carried the death penalty under the laws of war. But it seems that the army did not even try to identify the culprits, let alone offer effective protection from their attacks. The Creek environmental infrastructure and their other possessions were eagerly sought after by poor settlers and rich land speculators, alike.⁹⁴

Only too aware of the bad experiences of the Choctaw with corrupt contractors, the Chickasaw negotiated to hire their own trail leaders and guides. They also arranged for their wagon trains to be accompanied by a physician and an army officer who disbursed the government payments for travel expenses. After the deadly steamer accident, a large Choctaw wagon train of 4,000 people and 5,000 horses struggled overland through the swamplands of the Mississippi Valley, discarding much of their overweight cargo and losing 600 ponies. Smaller parties traveled west entirely on their own, camping and hunting along the way. With their well-prepared and self-organized wagon trains, the Choctaw suffered fewer human losses on the trek west than other nations. But they, too, encountered deadly disease soon after their arrival west of the Mississippi. One of their number, who had been infected during a steamer crossing of the Mississippi, brought smallpox to their new homeland, resulting in up to 500 deaths. Vaccinations stopped the epidemic, but in the ensuing panic, the crop fields were neglected, leading to food shortages and further sickness. The public health crisis paused the Choctaw removal for two years. It was resumed in 1840 and took another seven years to complete.⁹⁵

The Cherokee removal was the deadliest, with the “Trail of Tears” taking the lives of up to 4,000 people because of army razzias, detention in overcrowded camps, the trek west itself, and having to adapt to their new environment. The first group left in April 1832 and found none of the promised provisions or money waiting for them when they arrived at their destination at the Fort Smith Cherokee Agency. Hunger marked the summer of 1833 as the bulk of the Cherokees awaited deportation. Given the insecure future, few Cherokee seriously invested in cultivating their fields. Measles and cholera hit the waiting migrants. Halfway to their destination, one group of migrants decided to leave most of its

possessions temporarily at Little Rock in order to reach the Cherokee Agency on foot and avoid the rickety cholera-infested steamers. But, measles, dysentery, and upper respiratory diseases killed 80 of the 500 (more than half, children under the age of ten), and more perished after their arrival. To make matters worse, most of the possessions they had stored at Little Rock, including their plows and hoes, were stolen. Given the disastrous first experience, it is small wonder that the Cherokee removal proceeded at a snail's pace. By March 1838, only 2,000 Eastern Cherokee had moved west, leaving 15,000–17,000 still in their eastern homeland. US Army *razzias* drove the Cherokee from their villages into holding camps, and “rabble” looted Cherokee homes and livestock. The army moved the Cherokee west in groups of 1,000 people, on foot and by boat with those unable or too sick to walk loaded on wagons. Most of the Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw could at least take some of their mobile possessions with them (wagons, food, livestock). En route, they were detained in transit camps waiting for steamers and exposed to measles, fevers, drought, and the cold of winter. The first groups were guarded by soldiers, while some of the subsequent groups trekked west under their own leaders.⁹⁶

Adapting to the new hotter and drier environment of the Eastern Great Plains proved difficult for the displaced Eastern indigenous Americans. Realizing that the Great Plains were not a land of timber and maple trees, the (Huron-)Wyandot initially refused to move from their Great Lakes homes. Many fell ill during the long trek west, and during the first three months after their arrival, 60 of the 700 Wyandot perished, mostly the young. Although in the late 1830s and 1840s Indian Affairs agents reported that the indigenous Americans were adjusting well to their new environments, their statements may have been overly optimistic. The mid-1840s were marked by heavy rains and extensive flooding along the riverbanks where the Eastern indigenous American pioneer farmers had laid out their crop fields.⁹⁷

Unfortunately, the removal west did not mean the end of the displaced Eastern indigenous Americans' exposure to war and dislocation. As a condition for the move, both the Choctaw and the Chickasaw had requested US Army protection against their new Great Plains

indigenous American neighbors, whom they considered hostile.⁹⁸ Indeed, during the 1820s and early 1830s, competition over bison caused intense conflict between the Eastern newcomer groups and Western indigenous Americans, including the Comanche and the Wichita, although the Comanche subsequently accommodated the displaced groups.⁹⁹ When conflict erupted with the Osage over hunting rights, Delaware and Shawnee bands in the 1830s allied with the first groups of removed Cherokees and the Huron-Wyandot. During the 1840s, the Delaware fought the Osages, Pawnees, and Dakota Sioux.¹⁰⁰ A few decades later, the resettled Eastern indigenous Americans were caught up in the US Civil War. Confederate and Union raiders, including indigenous Americans, plundered farms, fields, and livestock in “Indian Country,” displacing thousands and again leaving them destitute.¹⁰¹

The US Conquest of the West

The Lewis and Clark expedition, while exploring the West for the United States in 1805, encountered the Shoshone-Bannock, a combination of Shoshone survivors of smallpox and Northern Paiute, who inhabited the arid Snake River Basin. The Shoshone-Bannock engaged in horse trade, fur hunting and trade, salmon fishing, and gathering the edible Cama bulbs. Dependent on the annual salmon run and on the winter camps where they stored preserved fish in underground caches, they were less mobile than some of their ancestors had been on the Northwestern Great Plains. In the mid-19th century, however, when the fur trade collapsed, many American settlers entered Shoshone-Bannock territory, leading to renewed conflict that escalated in the 1863 Bear Creek Massacre after the discovery of gold at Boise, Iowa. Some of the Shoshone-Bannock ended up in a refugee camp near Boise City in 1866, where they survived by begging, scavenging, prostitution, or serving as scouts for General George Crook’s campaigns against other indigenous Americans. In 1869, the refugees from the Boise City camp and other Shoshone were moved to the Fort Hall reservation. Chronic food shortages plagued the 1,000–1,700 Shoshone and Shoshone-Bannock in the reservation, forcing the indigenous Americans to hunt beyond its

boundaries. The authorities, in turn, attempted to keep the Shoshone on the reservation, which in 1878 led to the so-called Bannock war in which 12 percent of the population on the reservation perished.¹⁰²

The Ute narrowly escaped annihilation by allying themselves with the settler authorities and by abandoning the Great Plains to seek refuge in the mountains.¹⁰³ Contact with the US government began violently when an 1849 punitive army raid on a Ute village resulted in the destruction of 50 lodges with all their provisions. The Ute suffered another punitive army raid in 1854, which resulted in the destruction of additional lodges and a large quantity of saddles, robes, and other materials as well as the capture of 50 women and children.¹⁰⁴

Buffalo robes, an essential protection against the cold weather, and the buffalo hides that covered the tents were difficult to replace. Preparing the hide and robes was extremely labor intensive: on average, a woman tanned just ten robes per year. That bison winter robes processed by indigenous Americans were highly valued is attested to by their ability to fetch a price four to five times higher than a tanned summer hide produced by white commercial hunters.¹⁰⁵ By the fall of 1855, the Ute reportedly were “dying from famine” due to the loss of their homes, supplies, equipment, and the persistence of violence that inhibited harvesting and hunting.¹⁰⁶ Conflict and the alienation of settlement, hunting, and fishing territories by Mormon settlers in the mid-19th century transformed the Ute into desperate raiders.¹⁰⁷ Diplomacy and flight, however, allowed the Ute to survive: they allied themselves with the US government and retreated into the mountains, leaving the Great Plains region to growing numbers of white settlers. During the US Civil War, the Ute provided auxiliaries to the Union. At the same time, their neighbors suffered from destructive US Army scorched earth campaigns.¹⁰⁸

Unlike their Ute neighbors, the Sioux engaged in direct and sustained military conflict with the settlers in the 19th century. Lack of hunting prey caused the Sioux to move west of the Mississippi River in the late 18th century, opportunistically exploiting the power vacuum left after the powerful Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa settlements along the Missouri River had been devastated by smallpox in the 1780s.¹⁰⁹

Conflict about hunting territories between the Sioux and the Kiowa, Crow, and Shoshone marked the first half of the 19th century, until the Western Sioux bands controlled most of the region between the River Platte and Yellowstone. The 1837 smallpox epidemic and the devastating 1849 cholera, measles, and smallpox plagues that decimated the Sioux did not occur in a vacuum. Settlers and gold diggers may have carried the microbes into the Great Plains, but the dislocation caused by the massive forced removals in the 1830s and 1840s provided a major gateway for the introduction and spread of epidemics in the West. Thousands of the migrating Eastern indigenous Americans died of disease and starvation along the way.¹¹⁰

In the 1850s, the US government reservation policy in the Northwest Pacific region led to outright war. The violence spread to the Great Plains and the Southwest, and merged into the Civil War.¹¹¹ US authorities increasingly had located indigenous American reservations in wasteland and wilderness, making it unsurprising that the 1850s and 1860s were marked by drought, harvest failures, and famine for the Cherokee and other indigenous Americans on their new reservations in the West.¹¹² The maladministration of the reservations and the slow and inadequate disbursements of the promised subsidies and rations were major factors in the resurgence of mass violence.¹¹³

In the Northern Plains, indigenous American camps were the main targets of war.¹¹⁴ A brutal 1861–62 winter of starvation and delayed annuity payments in the following summer led to Sioux raids on the Lower Sioux Agency, the nearby town of Ulm, and Fort Ridgeley. Although only a minority of Santee-Sioux were involved in the raids, US Army punitive expeditions in 1863 and 1864 indiscriminately attacked any indigenous Americans they considered Sioux. The 1863 expedition took place in the heat of summer and was marred by disease, foul water, scarce grazing, and wild fires. To protect their camps, the retreating Sioux skirmished with the army and intentionally set fire to the dry vegetation to hinder the army's advance. But as they fled to the Missouri River, they had to abandon food stores, buffalo hides, and lodges, which the soldiers burned, leaving the refugees without shelter and food for the winter as they hastened across the river or into Canada. Having

dispersed the rebels, the army came across a large Yanktonais-Sioux hunting camp with 3,500 people engaged in scraping and drying large amounts of buffalo hides and meat. While their leaders were negotiating, the anxious Sioux women and children took the camp down and moved away with their travois laden with their lodges, dried meat, and hides. Claiming that the travois carried war booty, the army attacked, mowing down several hundred women and children. The remainder fled, abandoning all their possessions. The soldiers plundered and burned 300 lodges and destroyed 500 tons of dried meat after loading up 12 wagons of meat as provisions. The 1864 summer campaign resulted in the destruction of a large Sioux camp that counted 1,600 lodges and 8,000 inhabitants at Killdeer Mountain. Sioux warriors attempted to keep the army at a distance as artillery shells exploded among the lodges that their families were desperately taking down. When the army charged into the camp, the survivors bolted into the surrounding ravines. The soldiers pillaged the camp, appropriating buffalo robes and other goods, and stacking the remaining robes, dried berries, dried meat, and utensils on top of the lodgepoles and burning it all. They took no prisoners and shot any dogs they encountered wandering through the remains of the carnage.¹¹⁵

The Cheyenne fared no better. In 1864, after a couple of indigenous Americans were accused of horse theft, the US cavalry commander of Colorado ordered that the Cheyenne be punished severely and collectively. A cavalry unit attacked a Cheyenne village at Cedar Bluffs, killing or wounding 60 and destroying all the lodges and property. Another unit attacked an indigenous American encampment at Sand Creek and mowed down men, women, and children indiscriminately, destroying 130 lodges and capturing 500 horses and mules. An official government commission reported that fleeing women and children had been killed and that the US soldiers "tortured and mutilated in a manner that would put to shame the savage ingenuity of interior Africa."¹¹⁶ A captain who participated in the campaign commented: "There was no confidence to be placed in any of these Indians. They were a bad lot. They all needed killing." Reacting to the criticism that the Sand Creek massacre had elicited from Boston humanitarians, the same captain insisted that the

carnage was entirely justified.¹¹⁷ During the winter of 1867, a military column destroyed a village of 300 lodges as well as large amounts of property, including buffalo robes and equipment.¹¹⁸

Following the Civil War, President Ulysses Grant's Peace Policy toward the indigenous Americans maintained the reservations policy and the use of force where necessary, but stipulated that compliant indigenous Americans would receive government annuities, including money, rations, farming equipment, and livestock. The policy aimed to keep the indigenous Americans on the reserves and allow the reserves to develop through settled agriculture. Humanitarian supporters of a peace policy toward the indigenous Americans rejected the idea of "civilizing the Indian by starving him to death" as one US representative put it in 1874. His colleague added that exterminating the bison to rob the "Indians" of their subsistence was uncivilized and unchristian. Others, however, believed the destruction of the bison to be an acceptable price to "pacify" the indigenous Americans.¹¹⁹ De B. Randolph Keim, who had accompanied Sheridan's army on its 1868–69 winter campaign against the Southern Plains indigenous Americans as a *New York Herald* war correspondent, rejected the payment of annuities and food rations to keep them in the reservations as "bribes." He also disdained an 1867 measure that made it an offence to shoot indigenous Americans, countering that a "pacific course" made them "arrogant." Keim argued that the characteristic indigenous American ambushes and surprise attacks were the very opposite of "civilized war." Echoing the total war perspectives of Generals Sherman and Sheridan, Keim asserted that the indigenous Americans were on a path to "inevitable extermination."¹²⁰

During their 1868–69 operations against the Cheyenne and the Arapaho, Generals Sherman and Sheridan intentionally campaigned during the winter, when indigenous Americans were simultaneously the least mobile and the most vulnerable because food and forage were scarce. Keim stated that the Plains indigenous Americans "were entirely governed by the use of the pony" and that during the winter they "were paralyzed" because little forage was available. With their weakened horses, the indigenous people's fighting ability was at its lowest, and they could neither quickly move their families, lodges, and other

property nor save their winter food supplies. The correspondent emphasized that the best opportunity to destroy the indigenous Americans was when they were caught in the act of moving their tepee village because it forced the warriors to stand and fight to delay the enemy while the camp itself was a “scene of confusion and uproar.”¹²¹

Sheridan built a fort in the heart of the indigenous American hunting grounds to interfere with their hunting. By establishing several supply depots for his own troops and allowing the soldiers to hunt buffalo and other game for sustenance, the general denied the indigenous Americans valuable prey, thereby practicing a form of scorched earth. Sheridan’s force used Comanche auxiliaries and Osage guides to track down winter camps while Custer’s 7th Cavalry had orders to destroy the indigenous villages and ponies, kill the men, and capture the women and children. In November 1868, Custer caught up with Black Kettle’s camp, killing 100 people, including women and children who allegedly had joined the fight. Custer’s men destroyed or captured 51 lodges, 1,000 horses and mules, 1,000 buffalo robes and buffalo skins, and other property.¹²²

In December 1868, the hard-pressed indigenous Americans set fire to the grass over a wide area to hinder the army’s pursuit. The scorched earth action, however, did not prevent the army from destroying another 60-lodge village that harbored tons of dried buffalo meat, hundreds of bags of (maize) meal, and other food and equipment, but the grass burning destroyed the army columns’ forages as their food supplies dwindled. Having lost their food stores and being forced to remain constantly on the move, the indigenous Americans, too, soon found themselves hungry and short of forage. Disease and starvation took the lives of people and ponies alike. In May and June 1869, although the Cheyenne narrowly escaped their dogged pursuers, they lost yet more horses and supplies, including 10,000 pounds of dried meat and precious buffalo hides. In desperate straits, the Cheyenne finally agreed to move to their assigned reserve.¹²³

From 1868 on, the indigenous Americans on the Northern Plains who continued to resist shifted to a largely defensive strategy. They conducted raids against US Army forts and the railroad camps, halting the



FIGURE 8.1. US cavalry attacks the village of Black Kettle in 1868, leading to the loss of life and his people's dwellings and their contents including their food supplies. (*Harper's Weekly* 12, Dec. 19, 1868, 804, accessed online at [1868wikimediacommons](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1868/1868wikimediacommons)).

construction of the railroad through their territories. An 1875 US Army expedition against a rebel indigenous American winter camp failed because the cold weather slowed down the soldiers. Army campaigns against indigenous American villages in the spring and summer met with little success and culminated in Custer's disastrous defeat in June 1876. In late July, however, food shortages forced the militant indigenous Americans to break up their large camp and scatter in order to hunt. Low on rations and plagued by scurvy and dysentery, the US army columns could not catch up. Having succeeded in capturing an abandoned camp containing 5,000 pounds of dried meat and a supply of buffalo robes, the soldiers burned what they could not carry.¹²⁴

General Sheridan dispatched General George Crook to lead another winter campaign. Like Sheridan, Crook made extensive use of indigenous American scouts and auxiliaries, and his strategy consisted of relentlessly pursuing his opponents with mobile columns to hinder their recovery. Crook disarmed all the indigenous Americans residing on the reservations and recruited 350 Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshone, and Pawnee as scouts and auxiliaries, supplying them with horses confiscated from the Sioux chiefs. Crook also armed each of his indigenous American scouts with a gun and ammunition, promising them pay and all the horses they could capture. Launching his offensive in November 1876, Crook hoped to locate and destroy Crazy Horse's camp. His troops first stumbled upon a large Cheyenne camp in the Big Horn Mountains. The Cheyenne managed to escape with their families, their arms, and some of their horses, but the army captured buffalo robes, guns, and several hundred ponies, and burned the tepees, dried meat and pemmican stores, and clothing. Left destitute, at least 14 infants as well as an unknown number of other refugees froze or starved to death in the immediate aftermath. Only 1,000 of the 1,500 Cheyenne who escaped from Crook's attack at the Big Horn Mountains reached the safety of Crazy Horse's camp, 100 miles to the north. Crazy Horse's 3,000 people shared food, horses, and their tents with the Cheyenne survivors, greatly diminishing their own winter food supplies in the process. The army cornered Crazy Horse's camp in December. The refugees escaped but lost most of their precious winter food stores. Crazy Horse's

ally, Sitting Bull, retreated across the border to Canada in February 1877. Large-scale resistance in the Northern Great Plains ended with Crazy Horse's surrender in May of 1877.¹²⁵

The conflict in the Southern Great Plains unfolded in very similar ways. Here, too, the US Army intentionally focused on destroying the limited environmental infrastructure of the elusive indigenous Americans: dwellings and shelters, winter clothing, food stores, horses, and hunting prey. During the 1874 Red River campaign an army column encountered a large Comanche refugee village where women were drying meat and preparing pemmican. Most escaped, but the soldiers captured 120 women and children and 1,200 ponies, and destroyed 262 lodges as well as other property.¹²⁶ Later in the same year, the army located another large Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Comanche camp at Palo Duro Canyon. Soldiers destroyed all the lodges and winter stores, including quantities of sugar, flour, and dried buffalo meat, and captured 1,400 horses and mules. The army columns discovered a third camp in October and yet another in November. In both cases, the inhabitants managed to flee with their lives, but the soldiers destroyed their lodges, stores, and other property. Deprived of their winter food supplies, shelter and animals, the refugees were soon in dire straits; by March 1875, most had surrendered. An observer described the surrendered indigenous Americans as "wretched and poverty-stricken . . . bereft of lodges . . . with no ponies, half-starved . . . [and] scarcely anything that could be called clothing."¹²⁷

Warfare against indigenous Americans was also privatized and commodified through scalp and buffalo bounty hunting. Custer's defeat in 1876 had gutted the Peace Policy of whatever substance it had left.¹²⁸ The main objective in the conflict became to drive the indigenous Americans off, resettle them in reserves, or exterminate them. Settler authorities offered bounties for indigenous American scalps in the same way that they paid for exterminating such dangerous "vermin" as mountain lions, wolves, and coyotes.¹²⁹

Moreover, commercial hunters' extermination of the buffalo was not only an example of capitalist ecocide but also of classical scorched earth practices: it destroyed the main source of food, clothing, and shelter for

the indigenous Americans. Indirectly, the US Army greatly contributed to the destruction of the buffalo: it did not enforce treaties reserving bison ranges for indigenous American hunters, and commercial white hunters operated from its forts, receiving protection and logistical assistance. During the 1870s, Plains indigenous Americans continued to leave their reservations to hunt buffalo.¹³⁰ US Army leaders were very much aware that the dependence on buffalo was the indigenous American Achilles's heel. In 1869, the *Army Navy Journal* quoted General Sherman as having said: "The quickest way to compel the Indians to settle down to civilized life was to send ten regiments of soldiers to the plains with orders to shoot buffalos until they became too scarce to support the redskins." In a 1870 book about Sheridan's 1868–69 Plains winter campaign, De B. Randolph Keim explained that, to the indigenous Americans, the bison were as essential a resource as coconut trees to the inhabitants of the tropics: "Bisons constitute the commissariat of the Indian, and govern frequently his ability for war or control his desire for peace. . . . In numbers he is evidently rapidly diminishing, though the countless herds, found during the summer along the railroads, would seem to indicate that the race is far from running out." He emphasized, however, that "recently," the "ancient customs" had been largely abandoned because "the tribes have become scattered since the rapid depletion of the buffalo." Keim himself had observed very few buffalo in the Wichita Mountains, but ample evidence of their past abundance. His guide commented that the bison scarcity "was one of the consequences of war."¹³¹ In 1875, in the course of a debate about the slaughter of bison herds in the Texas state legislature, General Sheridan allegedly argued that only the extermination of the buffalo would bring lasting peace, and in 1881 the general wrote: "If I could learn that every Buffalo in the northern herd were killed I would be glad. . . . Since the destruction of the southern herd . . . the Indians on that section have given us no trouble."¹³²

The army, however, did not need to exterminate the buffalo directly. Rather, civilian commercial hunters like Buffalo Bill decimated the buffalo herds and reduced and fragmented their habitat.¹³³ As such, the buffalo ecocide was the product of war as well as commercial hunting

and, at the very least, aided and abetted by the US Army. In the 19th century, Great Plains buffalo hunting constituted a key component (along with raiding) of a war economy driven by considerations that surpassed any sustainability concerns from either a moral or a market economy perspective. For societies at war, the incentive was to retain access to the bison herds and deny the same to one's enemies in true scorched earth fashion, even if that meant exterminating the buffalo. That too, was basically the strategy of the Hudson Bay Company along the Canadian–US border: it created fur deserts to keep US-based hunters at bay.¹³⁴

The US Army had earlier successfully employed the ecocidal strategy of destroying game to break indigenous American resistance elsewhere. In late January 1865, after a fruitless 12-day pursuit, General Robert B. Mitchell decided that if he could not catch his indigenous opponents, “he could at least fire the whole country and make it a lean place for them.” The indigenous Americans set backfires and saved themselves, but the fire “swept the country clean” and “the game was driven out of the country [part of Colorado and the Texas panhandle].” The number of raids subsequently dropped dramatically because the lack of game made it impossible for the indigenous Americans to sustain themselves in the region throughout the winter.¹³⁵

On the eve of Spanish colonization in 1769, California had an estimated population of 300,000 indigenous Americans. By 1860, only 32,000 indigenous Americans were left, with just 22,000 by 1900.¹³⁶ Malaria and measles were among the greatest threats. Hudson Bay Company trappers brought virulent malaria from Oregon during the 1830s, and an 1833 malaria epidemic killed 20,000 indigenous Americans, effectively depopulating California's central valleys. A decade later, collapsed houses filled with bones and skulls remained as evidence of the epidemic's deadly impact. Malaria remained endemic in the region thereafter. In 1847, a measles epidemic raged in the Sacramento Valley. Too narrow a contagion narrative, however, once again shrouds the larger context of violence and displacement. The 1847 measles epidemic struck hard at a population that had been deprived of food and livelihoods. War conditions had severely interfered with access to “wild

foods” and moreover had blocked alternative wage labor opportunities at settler farms and ranches.¹³⁷

Ironically, the stunning success of the Californian hunter-gatherers in sustaining a large population on the acorn staple made them highly vulnerable to 19th-century environcidal warfare, causing their dramatic demise. Most Californian groups in the central interior were entirely dependent on the acorn stores in their villages.¹³⁸ Once their villages and food stores had been destroyed or the villagers forced to flee from their homes, they were doomed unless they were given the opportunity to gather more acorns and painstakingly process them. But the militia and mercenary bands that the Gold Rush unleashed never provided that opportunity.

The 1840s–50s Gold Rush resulted in the loss of indigenous American hunting and fishing resources as gold diggers occupied lands and mining polluted the waters. In the 1850s, federal troops and local militias drove California’s indigenous American populations into reserves that offered little protection from slave and livestock raiders. Food rations in the reserves were insufficient, the administration was disastrous, and its officials were notoriously corrupt. Most of the reserves closed in the 1860s, leaving the indigenous Americans entirely destitute. Raiding settler livestock from highland hideouts was an indigenous American survival strategy that, however, led to punitive counterraiders and heightened settler hysteria about an imminent outbreak of an all-out “Indian war.” Because there was no further “West” left to which to move the indigenous Americans, colonial policies oscillated between domestication and extermination. Domestication entailed “taming” the indigenous Americans by teaching them wage labor and settled life and agriculture.¹³⁹

Sexual violence factored significantly in the decline of the indigenous American populations in California. “Indian scares” depicted indigenous American men as rapists of white women, even as white men systematically assaulted and raped indigenous American women. Moreover, the violence accompanied starvation and disease, killing thousands during the 1850s and prejudicing women’s survival rates even more than men’s. The 1860 census revealed that women were substantially under-represented in every indigenous American age cohort in California.

Although women may have been undercounted because they were hiding, the California evidence nevertheless suggests strongly that the “Frontier” encounter was particularly destructive to indigenous American women.¹⁴⁰

By the mid-1880s, the surviving indigenous North Americans had been concentrated in 187 reservations. They were dependent on inadequate government rations that were sometimes withheld. Hunting small game and deer for food and hides remained important. Elderly men especially turned increasingly to cultivating small gardens with corn, squash, and potato. Others engaged in cattle and horse breeding, freight hauling, and migrant labor. Still, life on the reservations in the 1880s was characterized by droughts, hunger, and disease. One of the attempts to deal with the crises was the Ghost Dance movement that led to the fateful Sioux massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890.¹⁴¹

Surviving Environcide

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century violence displaced the indigenous Americans of the West from their lands and environmental infrastructure, exposing them to freezing cold, scorching heat, hunger, and disease, and causing unprecedented death and dramatic depopulation and displacement. By the end of the 19th century, US soldiers herded the remaining Western indigenous Americans into reservations on marginal lands. These reruns of the early 19th century forced removals were often death marches, and indigenous Americans initially were held in what were effectively concentration camps. At the reservations, US government-issue rations were insufficient and disease was rampant. In the late 18th century, the largest concentration of indigenous American populations occurred in California, which alone may have counted 300,000 people. The early 1800s forced removals added another 100,000 Eastern indigenous Americans to the indigenous populations of the West. By the late 1800s, however, 250,000 indigenous Americans remained in North America in total, fewer than the precontact indigenous population of California.

In many ways, the Western indigenous Americans were already in a precarious state by the early 1800s: they were overwhelmingly refugees or descendants of refugees, displaced by war, violence, and climate change. By the early 1900s, many Western indigenous Americans were still reconstructing societies and experimenting with new livelihoods and ways of life. Some were highly successful, building empires based on commercial hunting and raiding. But in the face of the maelstrom of violence, destruction, and displacement, none succeeded in rebuilding a sustainable environmental infrastructure. Hunting dwindling buffalo, beaver, and deer populations and gathering Cama, berry, acorn, and fish became increasingly fraught with conflict, while making war pay through slave and livestock raiding triggered only more violence.

Throughout it all, Western indigenous Americans were both victims and agents of history—at times, simultaneously.¹⁴² Nineteenth-century war and displacement opened space for invaders, human and nonhuman, causing fundamental political, social, economic, and environmental change. The demise of the buffalo, for example, opened the Great Plains for invasive European livestock. Western indigenous Americans, however, were not merely passive victims of history. Rather, they demonstrated incredible resilience and ingenuity: despite demographic collapse and the destruction of entire societies and ways of life, the displaced rebuilt lives and livelihoods in alien environments in insecure and violent circumstances. Moreover, they survived more than one episode of environcidal war and displacement in the space of a few generations: pre-19th-century environcide, and one or two more episodes of environcide during the 19th century. In the process, sometimes out of despair and sometimes as a planned strategy, they themselves also deployed environcidal violence against neighbors and invaders, both indigenous Americans and Europeans.