

CAUSES OF THE PLAINS WARS 1:

- First whites crossing the Plains in the 1840s, 1850s and into 1860s (early settlers, miners, wagon trails to the west coast, Mormons) disturbed the buffalo herds. They demanded the US government protect them against Indian attacks.
- Ranchers trailed cattle, then brought cattle on to the Plains. Indians sometimes stole their cattle and ranchers attacked Indians in the late 1860s.
- Homesteaders occupied land and began to farm it. In the 1860s, and increasingly in 1870s and 1880s, they put up fences and blocked off water holes.
- Later, miners found gold in the west itself, in Colorado in early 1860s and in the Black Hills of Dakota in 1876. Miners had no respect for Indians, or for treaties made by the US government.

CAUSES OF THE PLAINS WARS 2:

- Their buffalo hunting was destroyed by trails, railroads, ranchers and homesteaders.
- The whites shot buffalo for sport, for their hides and for their bones, which were sent East for use as fertiliser or glue.
- Railroad building made this disturbance of the buffalo worse.
- They were also killed deliberately to force the Indians on to reservations. In 1840 there were probably 13,000,000 buffalo; by 1885 there were 200.
- Life on the reservations was very hard. Indians were often given land which was infertile.
- Indians found that they could not support themselves and had to be given food to keep them alive. The food was very poor quality.
- Indian Agents were often corrupt and kept much of the money for themselves.

EVENTS OF THE PLAINS WARS:

- They (The Indians) were fighting against a far more powerful enemy.
- The army had better and more effective weapons, including guns with long-range sights and far more men available.
- The soldiers attacked in the winter, when temperatures were below zero and snow was on the ground. Indians could not fight in these conditions.
- There were far fewer of them, so casualties were much more important. They could not fight continuously over a long period. They had to look after their families and find food and water etc.
- They did not usually join tribe with tribe; tribes would not fight to help each other. In fact, some tribes (Crow, Shoshone) regularly helped whites against the Sioux, their old enemies.
- They attacked supplies, such as food, shelter, clothing and animals, so they could not go on fighting.
- They had fewer and usually poorer weapons, Little Bighorn was exceptional: Custer had single-shot rifles while Indians had repeaters.

RESULTS OF THE PLAINS WARS:

- They were forced to give up land in treaties with the government.
- The buffalo was hunted almost to extinction. The Indians depended on buffalo for many things. Their disappearance was a disaster.
- Without buffalo, Indians had to change their way of life. For example, their tipis were covered with canvas, not buffalo hide.
- Indians could no longer hunt and did not want to farm.
- The chiefs were ignored by the whites, so their power and authority collapsed.
- They were not allowed to practise their religion.
- Indians were converted to Christianity and were treated as second class whites.
- Their children were sent away to schools and were given whites' clothing.
- They were taught to speak English and were punished for speaking in Native American language.
- Diseases from the whites became common and killed many. They had no dignity. Many became alcoholics to forget their meaningless life.