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Jesuit Priest Pierre-Jean De Smet, known as "Black Robe" to the Lakota. US Library of Congress Representing the U.S. Government were Thomas Fitzpatrick (long-time fur trader and Indian Agent) and David D. Mitchell (Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis). Two notable Americans acted as translators: Jesuit priest Pierre-Jean De Smet who had 50 years of frontier experience translated for the Lakota who called him "Black Robe." Mountain man Jim Bridger translated for the Crow. The Tribal Nations who attended included: Oglala and Brule Lakota (represented by six chiefs), Cheyenne (four chiefs), Arapahoe (three chiefs), Crow and Assiniboin (each represented by two chiefs), as well as the Mandan and Hidatsa (combined represented by two chiefs.) Others were invited but did not attend including the Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache. The Pawnee refused to attend after they were threatened with attack by the Lakota. Critical Treaty Articles Article 1: This was an attempt to create a "lasting peace" not only among U.S. citizens and Native Americans but also among the different tribes. Those who signed the treaty agreed to "peaceful relations amongst themselves... and agree to abstain in future from all hostilities whatever against each other, to maintain good faith and friendship in all their mutual intercourse, and to make an effective and lasting peace." Article 2: This gave the U.S. government the right to build roads through Native American lands and military posts along them for resupply and protection. Articles 3 & 4: Established the responsibility of the U.S. to protect Native Americans from "all depredations by the people" of the U.S. committed against Native Americans and for the Native Americans to make restitution for the "depredations" committed by their own against the people of the U.S. in their respective territories. Article 5: This article attempted to, for the first time, lay out on paper the territories claimed by the Tribal nations that showed up. Here, Father De Smet played a critical role as he was very familiar with the lands claimed by the Lakota. Jim Bridger played a similar role for the Crow. Contrary to what some believe, this article did not establish the reservation system, but it would be a step in that direction, finally becoming a reality with the ratification of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 (a second Fort Laramie Treaty). These territorial boundaries were quickly ignored by nearly all sides. Article 7: This article promised that the U.S. would pay the Tribal nations \$50,000 per year for ten years, with an option to extend this on a year-by-year basis for the following five years. This article has sparked some controversy as the original time was supposed to be for fifty years but before ratification Congress changed the length to ten years. From here, the treaty was supposed to go back to the original signers for them to approve the change before it became law. This has since led many to the conclusion that the U.S. meant to deceive the Native Americans, which might have some truth, but it is also an example of the challenges of communicating across cultures. The Native Americans believed that the men that showed up to negotiate with them had the final say, but they did not. A digital image of the original Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, along with a transcript of the text can be found on the website of the National Archives. Impact of the Treaty The treaty was signed on September 17, 1851 but never ratified. Consequently, there has been some debate concerning its validity. Almost immediately after the conclusion of the council, articles of the treaty were broken. While the Federal Government had promised to protect Tribal resources and hunting grounds from depredations by White settlers, it lacked the resources to enforce this obligation. In addition, only one of the promised annuity payments was ever made. By 1864, Whites settlers demand for land pressured the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho into warfare, ending the hope for peace. By 1868 relations between White travelers/settlers and tribal nations on the Great Plains had deteriorated to the point where the US Government once again decided to negotiate a treaty with Tribal peoples; in this case the Oglala, Minicoujou, and Brule bands of Lakota people, Yanktonai Dakota, and Arapaho Nation. The result of these negotiations was the "Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868". The US government created a treaty to attempt to ease the growing tension between white settlers and Plains Indians. The US government's aim was to guarantee the safety of white settlers travelling through Indian Territory and to stop tribal fighting amongst the Plains Indians. However, there were several problems in creating the agreement... Firstly, the US government found it difficult to get an individual from each tribe to effectively represent their whole tribe. Remember, Plains Indian society did not have someone who could dictate the actions of the whole tribe. Secondly, some tribes did not attend the meetings and most of the Plains Indians who did attend had no real respect or interest in the US government. Thirdly, it was difficult to set clear territorial boundaries for each Indian tribe. Indian society did not set fixed boundaries on land as they usually travelled extensively to hunt buffalo and gather food. Finally, the treaty as written in English and many of the Indian representatives did not fully understand what they had agreed to. Nevertheless, on 17 September 1851 the First Fort Laramie Treaty was signed. It stipulated that Plains Indians would stop inter-tribal fighting, let white migrants and railroad surveyors travel safely through their lands, allow the US government to build roads and army posts in their land, and to pay compensation to the US government if their tribe members broke these rules. In return, the US government stated they would protect Plain Indians from any white Americans and pay the tribes a \$50,000 annuity providing they stuck to the treaties terms. Print/Text "The discussions at Washington, D.C., in May and June had been unsuccessful, but officials still hoped to effect an arrangement whereby, in return for cash payment and other considerations, the Sioux would cede the Black Hills or at least consent to the presence of American citizens on their land." Wayne R. Kline, ed., The Black Hills Journals of Colonel Richard Irving Dodge (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 10 Colonel Richard Irving Dodge was one of several officers sent to the Black Hills post to expel unauthorized people in the area. Hover over image to zoom "Richard Irving Dodge," frontispiece from Richard Irving Dodge, Our Wild Indians (Hartford, CT: A. D. Worthington and Co., 1884) Prin/Image From the earliest days of the United States, the federal government had not known what to do about Indian tribes. Finally, in 1831, in a case titled Cherokee Nation vs Georgia, the Supreme Court decided that Indian tribes were not foreign nations and were not states. Indian tribes were described as "domestic dependent nations." As nations, Indian tribes were not subject to the laws of states. However, the Constitution of the United States did not provide any guidelines for dealing with another nation within the boundaries of the United States. This ruling also meant that Indians were not citizens of the United States. Map 1: Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. This treaty was the first effort to define the territory of the Great Sioux Nation of Lakotas, Dakotas, and Nakotas. The treaty council was attended by thousands of Sioux men and their families as well as soldiers and officers of the U.S. Army, representatives of the United States government, and interpreters. Note that the tribes that surrounded the Sioux Treaty Lands did not yet have defined territories. The Treaty of 1851 did not establish a reservation, but began the process of defining territory in which the Sioux could live and hunt. The treaty was supposed to reduce warfare among the Indian tribes of the northern Great Plains. The United States had to deal with Indian tribes through treaties. Treaties are written documents that outline the specific nature of the relationship between nations. Treaties are used to define alliances and to end wars. The treaties between the United States and Indian tribes generally defined the geographical territory the tribes could inhabit, land cessions (land the tribes gave up their claims to), and payments the government made for land cessions. Tribes made some demands for payment in dollars or goods and for schools or agencies. However, the tribes were often weak or impoverished when they signed the treaties, so they had little power to make demands. In 1851, one of the most important treaties was signed at Fort Laramie in present-day Wyoming. The treaty council was attended by thousands of Indians from several different tribes. The Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1851 defined boundaries between Indian tribes of the northern Great Plains. (See Map 1.) The tribes that signed the treaty in 1851 agreed to allow travelers, railroad surveyors, and construction workers to enter tribal lands safely; allow the government to establish posts and roads; pay for any wrongdoing of their people; select head chiefs to deal with U.S. government agents; cease fighting with other tribes. The United States had to protect Indians from U.S. citizens; deliver annuities if the terms of the treaty were upheld. The Treaty of 1851 had several problems. There were not enough interpreters to be sure that every tribe had a full understanding of the treaty which was written in English. Another problem was that the government was accustomed to making decisions through elected representatives. Western Indian tribes made decisions when all of the people agreed (consensus). These two traditions clashed. The tribes agreed to appoint chiefs who signed the document, but they could not control the people who were not part of the decisions. A more important problem was that the terms of the treaty were broken by U. S. citizens, the government, and the tribes. Over the next several years, the treaty faced new challenges. The Civil War had ended. The Union Pacific Railroad was under construction. Gold had been found in Montana and Colorado. There were many more people traveling west through the Great Plains. The increase in travel led to increase in conflict. Some of the conflict was centered on the Bozeman Trail in Wyoming that ran right through Sioux treaty lands toward the gold fields of Montana. Red Cloud, an Oglala Lakota, declared that he would continue to make war on travelers and Army posts until the government closed the road and removed the Army. The Army also established military posts in Sioux treaty lands. Fort Rice and Fort Buford on the Upper Missouri River were on or near treaty lands. Sitting Bull, Gall, and other Hunkpapas continually harassed these posts and demanded that the posts be removed. Map 2: Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. The U. S. government sent agents to discuss a new treaty with the Great Sioux Nation in 1868. The treaty created the Great Sioux Reservation (in gray). Unceded lands (in yellow) in Wyoming, Nebraska and Dakota Territory were reserved for hunting. A portion of the unceded lands in northern Dakota Territory became part of the Great Sioux Reservation (later Standing Rock Reservation) following an agreement between the federal government and the Sioux leaders in September 1876. Forts bordered the eastern edge of Sioux treaty lands. However, the Sioux had focused attacks on Fort Phil Kearney in central Wyoming, forcing the government to abandon the post under the terms of this treaty. In 1868, a treaty commission again met at Fort Laramie. The U. S. agents at the council came with a new federal policy that focused on placing all tribes on reservations. The Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868 established the Great Sioux Reservation which included the sacred Black Hills. (See Map 2.) Annuities (payments) of food and clothing were to be delivered to Indians living on the reservation. The government promised to close the Bozeman trail and the forts along the trail. According to the agreement, the treaty had to be signed by three-fourths (3/4 or .75 percent) of the males of the tribes. Many bands of Lakota Sioux agreed to the treaty. Some of them were already living within the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation. Others, such as Two Bears and his band, lived nearby and cooperated with the agents, though they did not move onto the reservation. However, many did not sign the treaty. Sitting Bull and his band of Hunkpapas were among those who did not sign the treaty. The government considered the Hunkpapas dangerous because they refused to live on a reservation and continued to hunt north of the reservation. Six years later, in 1874, gold was found in the Black Hills. Though the government offered to buy the land, the Sioux tribes refused the offer. The Black Hills were sacred to the Sioux and they would not sell. The Army did not prevent gold miners from entering the Black Hills. The federal government then demanded that all the Sioux report to the reservation. Sitting Bull and his band refused. More conflict followed. Treaties which were meant to bring peace led directly to more conflict. Why is this important? The Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1851 created a short period of peace which allowed more settlers to enter or travel legally through tribal lands. However, as more non-Indians traveled through Sioux treaty lands, there were more opportunities for conflict and misunderstanding. The conflicts led members of Congress to think that another treaty was necessary. The treaties created a new problem for the Sioux. Once the government had established specific territorial boundaries for the tribes, federal agents could negotiate for more land cessions. The Sioux came to the 1868 treaty council with a great deal of power because Red Cloud and Sitting Bull had fought settlers, miners, and the Army. However, the Sioux lost land in this treaty council, and over the next forty years would continue to lose land originally promised to them by the Treaty of 1851. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions. — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. What was the Fort Laramie Treaty? The Fort Laramie Treaty gave land and money to each Plains tribe if they let settlers, travellers, and government agents cross the Plains in safety. Why was the Fort Laramie Treaty signed? The US Government was under pressure to protect people migrating west, as the migrants were worried about conflict with the Native Americans. The Government's solution was to make an agreement with a of different tribe leaders. Why was the Fort Laramie Treaty difficult to achieve? There were 5 main issues in arranging an agreement. ♦ The Council of Tribal Leaders. Gathering the leaders of each tribe was very problematic. Few tribes had an overall leader who could speak for all the bands within a tribe. Often the government chose them, which did not please the tribes. ♦ Inclusion. Many tribes were unrepresented. Some of those who attended the only came for the food and gifts, and therefore did not take part in the discussions, to give their tribe's point of view. ♦ Boundaries. The US government wanted agreements made on borders and boundaries. However, Native Americans did not view land in this way. They saw land as there for everyone, and could not see why their movements needed to be limited. ♦ Language. Not all tribes spoke the same language, and there were not enough translators to make sure everyone understood the proceedings. Not all the tribes could engage properly with the negotiations. ♦ Attitudes. Some white Americans were exterminators, and did not believe a peaceful agreement could or should be reached. Some Native Americans, such as the Crow nation, felt the same. When was the Fort Laramie Treaty signed? The Fort Laramie Treaty was signed on 17th September 1851. Who were the signatories to the Fort Laramie Treaty? The Fort Laramie Treaty was agreed between the US Government and Native American tribal chiefs. What was agreed in the Fort Laramie Treaty? There were 7 main points agreed in the Fort Laramie Treaty. ♦ Fighting would end between Native Americans and white Americans. ♦ Migrants could travel safely through Native American lands. ♦ Railroad surveyors would be allowed to enter Native American lands in safety. ♦ Road and army posts could be set up in the Native American lands. ♦ Native American tribes would have to pay compensation if they broke any of the agreement. ♦ The US Government agreed to protect Native Americans from white Americans, and to stop white Americans from settling on Native American lands. ♦ Native Americans were to receive a fixed sum of money each year, as long as they kept to the terms of the How much did the tribes receive as part of the Fort Laramie Treaty? The Native American tribes received \$50,000 a year, as long as the was unbroken. However some tribes never received payment. What were the consequences of the Fort Laramie Treaty? The Fort Laramie Treaty had 3 major consequences for the Plains Indians. ♦ It encouraged them to rely on the US government for food and money. This dependency also meant obedience. ♦ It gave each tribe their own land, rather than giving them the freedom to be truly nomadic. This resulted in the creation of ♦ It ended the principle of the Permanent Indian Frontier, as white Americans later settled in Native American lands, even though this broke the Fort Laramie Treaty. Syllabus EditionFirst teaching 2016Last exams 2025The Fort Laramie Treaty aimed to establish peace and territorial boundaries between indigenous tribes and the US federal government. This was vital for white settlers as they moved westward.The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 was significant. It represented an attempt by the US government to ease tensions between white settlers and indigenous peoples. It also recognised the territorial rights of indigenous tribes. However, this was only achieved by placing tribes into reservations. This would become a serious issue when the US government made these reservations smaller.The treaty failed to achieve its intended objectives. Warfare between tribes continued. White settlers continued to ignore indigenous territories. They settled, farmed, hunted and built on tribal lands. White migrants also travelled on land well away from the Oregon Trail. The US government promised that the Army would prevent white settlers from doing these actions. In reality, the US Army did not intervene. As a result, conflict and tension between white settlers and indigenous peoples remained an issue on the Plains. By 1851, the tensions between white settlers and indigenous peoples became dangerous.White settlers acted aggressively toward Indigenous peoplesThere was increased competition for food and resources in the PlainsWhite settlers did not feel safeA flow chart showing how the different factors caused the government to create the Fort Laramie TreatyA concept map showing the difficulties that the US government faced when creating the Fort Laramie TreatyAgreements made by the Indigenous peoplesAgreements made by the US governmentTo stop wars between tribesTo protect the Indigenous peoples and their land from the actions of white settlersTo not attack migrants travelling through their landTo allow railway companies to survey their landTo allow the government to build roads and places to station troopsTo give each tribe an annuity of \$50,000 for upholding the terms of the Fort Laramie TreatyTo pay compensation if any tribal members break the terms of the Fort Laramie TreatyThe American West paper tests you on your specific knowledge of the period. Try to remember key aspects of the Fort Laramie treaty, for example, the annuity of \$50,000. This will show the examiner that you have in-depth knowledge of the American West, a key assessment objective for this course.The Fort Laramie Treaty:Attempted to designate land for each tribeThis was the first step towards reservationsinsisted that the Indigenous peoples accept white settlers and government interference on their landThis went against the 'Permanent Indian Frontier', created in 1834Made the Indigenous tribes more dependent on the US governmentThe tribes had to stick to the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty to receive their annuity of food and productsThe treaty terms did not allow the Indigenous peoples to travel outside of their land. This further restricted their ability to find food and resourcesNot all tribal members stuck to the Fort Laramie TreatyEven if the chief of the tribe signed the agreement, each band chose whether to follow the treaty or notSitting Bull and Crazy Horse refused to agree to the treatyMany tribal representatives did not understand the terms of the treatySome tribes did not have the treaty translated to themThere were different interpretations of landownershipAs a result, many tribes misinterpreted the treatyThe US government did not respect the treatyWhen the Sioux complained about the size of their hunting grounds, the US government said that all tribes could hunt on each other's territoryThis showed that the government did not take the boundaries seriouslyIt was the first step in creating smaller reservationsExplain one consequence of the Fort Laramie Treaty (1851)4 marksAnswer:One consequence of the Fort Laramie Treaty was how it created future conflict between the indigenous peoples and the US government. The Fort Laramie Treaty was written in English and gave each tribe a reservation to live on. This caused conflict because some tribal leaders did not agree or understand the terms of the treaty. This made it more likely that tribes would break the terms of the treaty either accidentally or on purpose. Therefore, the Fort Laramie Treaty created more tension and issues with the indigenous peoples of America. This question has previously asked you to explain two consequences. In the American West exam paper for 2025, this question will ask you to explain one consequence. However, there will be two different "Explain one consequence of" questions each, worth four marks. The "Explain one consequence" question tests how you can explain your wider knowledge of the period. Once you have studied more of the course, you may be able to add more specific evidence to your answer. An example could be the Little Crow War. Did this page help you? GCSEHistoryEdexcelHistory: Edexcel GCSE American West1.3.1As manifest destiny and US government policy showed, the US government wanted the settlers to spread across North America. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson had signed the Indian Removal Act'. This forced the Indians to move all of their people from the east of the Mississippi River to the west of the Mississippi River. This was a 'forced resettlement' that made roughly 50,000 Plains Indians move west. In 1834, the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act formed a boundary between USA and Indian Territory, banning Americans from buying or renting land from the Indians. It effectively stopped them from using Indian land. More migrants were travelling along the Oregon Trail and more farmers were settling in the Great Plains. This meant that the migrants and settlers were competing with the Indians for food, water and other resources. In 1868, the US government signed a treaty with representatives of the Plains Indian tribes. It secured safe passage along the Oregon Trail for all travellers. Settlers would be permitted to settle and build on the land along the trail. In exchange, the Plains Indians would receive an annual payment of \$50,000. The Treaty was also supposed to end wars between the Indian tribes, but within a few years, the Crow and Cheyenne tribes were back at war. Fort Laramie also introduced railroad surveyors and military posts in Indian territory, whilst tribes had to pay fines if they attacked white settlers. As well as the Fort Laramie Treaty, the US government passed the Indian Appropriations Act. This act moved nomadic tribes into enclosed areas called 'reservations'. These reservations would be protected by the US government. Theoretically, reservations would preserve areas of land for the Plains Indians to continue their lives undisturbed by settlers and migrants. However, the shift imposed White Settler property rights on the Indians and undermined their nomadic lifestyle and independence. The reservations effectively forced the Plains Indians to live in a smaller area of land. More settlers moved to the Plains and travelled the Oregon Trail. Jump to other topicsUnlimited access to 10,000+ open-ended exam questionsMini-mock exams based on your study historyUnlock 800+ premium courses & e-booksGet started with Seneca PremiumGrade 9+ The Early Settlement of the WestPage 20CSSEHistoryEdexcelHistory: Edexcel GCSE American West1.3.2New settlements and towns were popping up all over America. Often there were no policemen or judges in a town. This caused many problems and earned the area the name 'The Wild West'. Lots of Chinese migrants entered California during the 1852 famine. Slavery was not abolished in the USA until 1865 and many African people were still kept as slaves in America. Plains Indians were the indigenous population of America, but they were being forced into reservations. Between 1870 and 1900, 7 million migrants came to America from Northern Europe (Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia) and 3 million migrants came from Southern Europe (places like Italy). There was huge diversity in America. In New York, between the 1830s and 1850s, the Forty Thieves of Five Points and the Bowery Boys of lower Manhattan were notorious gangs. The gangs were involved in violence, fighting, gambling, the sale of alcohol, and prostitution. The population of California grew to 380,000 people by 1858. San Francisco was its largest town at the time. The Gold Rush was unsuccessful for most migrants. They were now stuck on the West Coast, away from their families, with no jobs and no money. These are the perfect conditions for gangs to recruit people into a criminal life. The homicide (murder) records for San Francisco show suspected murderers as the Hounds (who were an anti-foreign migrant gang) and the Chileans (who were migrants from Latin America). Local police forces were very small. In response, citizens set up 'vigilance groups', which became known as vigilantes. These people would hunt down and punish suspects without the legal system. Miners' courts were created in mining camps. Here, a group of fellow miners who judge cases and claims. Settlers could set up remote farms in locations all across the Great Plains. Mining communities could well be in very remote areas. This meant that there could be no way of enforcing the law within communities or with criminals trying to attack these communities. Marshals and sheriffs were appointed in order to try to resolve the problem of lawlessness in the west of the United States. The federal (central) government appointed US marshals. The US marshals would be in charge of a whole region or State. States are enormous, for example the state of California covers 424,000 square kilometres. This is a big area to police. US marshals would then appoint deputy marshals. They would look after smaller regions within a state. Town marshals would be elected by local citizens. Lots of crime in the 1800s was linked to alcohol, drinking, gambling, and saloons (bars). Sheriffs were the local law enforcer. They would be allocated a county and they could rally 'posses' to chase criminals. Sheriffs usually had a tenure of 2 years. In 1852, there were 23,000 miles of telegraph wiring in the United States. However, telegraph communication was imprecise, slow and ineffective relative to today's communication systems. It took take weeks or days for a marshal to find out about a crime and by then, the criminal could be miles away in any direction, having escaped on horseback. Marshals and sheriffs didn't get much training, weren't paid well, and this made them vulnerable to corruption. 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