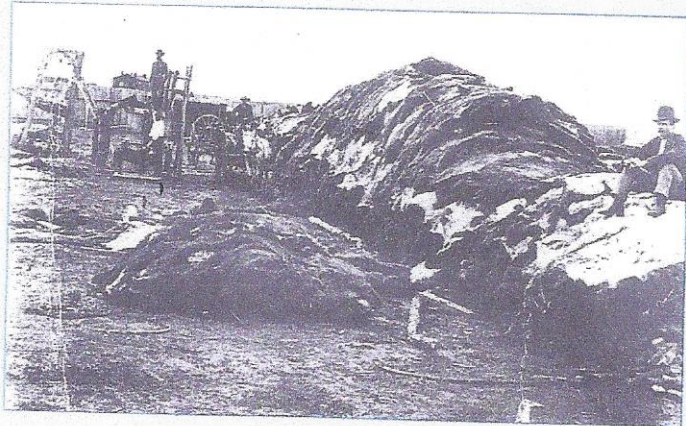


Slaughter of the Buffalo

The manner in which the opening of the West after the Civil War is depicted in textbooks has changed in dramatic ways during the past two decades. More attention is now given to the impact on the environment



Kansas State Historical Society

and on the nomadic lifestyle of the Native American residents of the Great Plains arising from the disappearance of the buffalo herds. The critical role that these animals played in sustaining the Indian way of life meant that the task of white settlers became much less dangerous when the buffalo were gone. Pictures such as this one of forty thousand hides piled up outside Dodge City, Kansas, convey a dramatic sense of the extermination of these animals. Of course, no picture can impart the odor of that many hides.

History last 2 decades change

had gone hits - environmental - nomadic lifestyle

40,000 hides!

Pressures on the Indians

The 1870s brought increasing tensions. The 1870 census reported more than 2.7 million farms; ten years later, that number had risen to more than 4 million. A competition for space and resources intensified. With millions of acres under cultivation and the spread of cattle drives across Indian lands, the tribes found themselves squeezed from their traditional nomadic hunting grounds.

The systematic destruction of the buffalo herds dealt Indians another devastating blow. In the societies of the Plains tribes, the meat of the bison supplied food, and the hides provided shelter and clothes. Removal of these resources hurt the Indians economically, but the cultural impact was even greater because buffalo represented the continuity of nature and the renewal of life cycles.

The decline of the herds began during the 1860s as drought, disease, and erosion shrank their habitat. Then the demand for buffalo robes and pemmican (dried buffalo meat, berries, and fat) among whites spurred more intensive hunting. As railroads penetrated the West, hunters could send their products to customers with relative ease. More than 5 million buffalo were slaughtered during the early 1870s, and by the end of the century, only a few of these animals were alive. Conservation eventually saved the buffalo from the near extinction.

During the mid-1870s, Native Americans tried a last effort to block the social and economic tides overwhelming their way of life. By that time, Grant's peace policy had

Pressure # FARMS 1870 - 2.7M 1880 - 4M

nomadic

food - shelter - clothes

2 white MARKETS

RR shipped hides 1870s - 5M

ENDING