

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: la questione indiana

As those people are extremely apt to get drunk, and, when so, are very quarrelsome and disorderly, we strictly forbid the selling any liquor to them; and when they complain'd of this restriction, we told them that if they would continue sober during the treaty, we would give them plenty of rum when business was over.

[...]

The next day, sensible they had misbehav'd in giving us that disturbance, they sent three of their old counselors to make their apology. The orator acknowledg'd the fault, but laid it upon the rum; and then endeavored to excuse the rum by saying, "The Great Spirit, who made all things, made every thing for some use, and whatever use he design'd any thing for, that use it should always be put to. Now, when he made rum, he said 'Let this be for the Indians to get drunk with,' and it must be so." And, indeed, if it be the design of Providence to extirpate these savages in order to make room for cultivators of the earth, it seems not improbable that rum may be the appointed means. It has already annihilated all the tribes who formerly inhabited the sea-coast.

Indian Wars is the name generally used in the United States to describe a series of conflicts between the colonial or federal government and the native people of North America. Although the earliest English settlers in what would become the United States often enjoyed peaceful relations with nearby tribes, as early as the Pequot War of 1637, the colonists were taking sides in military rivalries between Indian nations in order to assure colonial security and open further land for settlement. The wars, which ranged from the seventeenth-century (King Philip's War, King William's War, and Queen Anne's War at the opening of the eighteenth century) to the Wounded Knee massacre and "closing" of the American frontier in 1890, generally resulted in the opening of Native American lands to further colonization, the conquest of American Indians and their assimilation, or forced relocation to Indian reservations.

In the **Wounded Knee Massacre**, on December 29, 1890, 500 troops of the U.S. 7th Cavalry, supported by four Hotchkiss guns (a lightweight artillery piece designed for travel with cavalry and used as a replacement for the aging twelve-pound mountain howitzer), surrounded an encampment of Miniconjou Sioux (Lakota) and Hunkpapa Sioux (Lakota). The Army had orders to escort the Sioux to the railroad for transport to Omaha, Nebraska. One day prior, the Sioux had given up their protracted flight from the troops and willingly agreed to turn themselves in at the Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota. They were the very last of the Sioux to do so. They were met by the 7th Cavalry, who intended to use a display of force coupled with firm negotiations to gain compliance from them. The commander of the 7th had been ordered to disarm the Lakota before proceeding. During the process of disarmament, a deaf tribesman named Black Coyote could not hear the order to give up his rifle. This set off a chain reaction of events that led to a scene of sheer chaos and mayhem with fighting between both sides in all directions.