

Native Americans



I- The Construction of a myth

A) The Manifest Destiny

A god-given right to rule the continent and extend civilization westward

Idea that Natives were not using the land properly, wasting it

“Conquering the wilderness”, even expanding frontier, unpopulated: provided settlers legitimacy to invade these lands

In reality: brutal conquest, genocide

Easier to conquer the west because they had legitimacy thanks to the manifest destiny

B) The use of image

Cameras arrival coincides with the westward expansion

Used to immortalize the myth

No pictures of the lands before 1848

It fueled the myth of an untouched Wild West

The Hollywood industry= deserted landscapes, heroic figures, untamed frontier waiting to be conquered

C) The denial of their existence

Textbooks, curriculums: nothing is taught in schools except biased and simplistic narratives perpetuating the myth

Stereotypical representations (Pocahontas, Peter Pan)

Prohibition of certain cultural practices

Forced assimilation

Natives Americans depicted as obstacles to civilization and progress



II- Multifaceted evolutions

A) The evolution of interactions between natives and settlers

Initial encounters: 1492, C. Colomb ; Mayflower 1620= cooperation and exchanges (thanksgiving)

Over time: conflicts, colonization, resource exploitation, transmission of diseases: end of peaceful relations

Colonial purposes, expansion inclinations, rivalries, cultural differences= led to displacements, demographic decline, violence, genocide, slavery

B) The evolutionary frontier

Westward expansion: Boundary shifts in the 19th century= gradually displaced Native Americans from their ancestral lands

Government decisions: compelled NA to deport

Native Americans placed in reservations

“Gold rush”: influx of gold seekers: displacement of Indians

Construction of railways: crucial role on redefining borders: fragmentation of the lands

Buffalo hunters: spread on the lands: extinction of the species: NA lost their main resources

Evolution of the frontier: altered the natural movements of NA: not allowed on some lands anymore

C) Progress nowadays

20th century: creation of reserves for Native Americans

The Assimilation Policy: forced the Indians to leave their land and settle in urban areas in order to become "productive" members of society

Placement of Indian orphans in the homes of white families

Since the 1970s: rebirth of Indian culture

Today: Native Americans represent 3M people

Today: more than 300 reserves in the USA et more than 2500 in Canada



https://youtu.be/P7bbiXnnqPI?si=hAt_NvhEcj0BllkD

Native americans' history timeline

