

Landless Indians in the 20th Century

Lesson 1

Guiding Questions for the Lesson

- What was life like for “landless Indians” in Montana, less than 100 years ago?
- How did some media outlets (newspapers) depict the landless Indians?

Standards

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

EU 6 History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

Social Studies Standards

SS.CG.6-8.5 Identify events and leaders that ensure that key United States principles of equality and civil rights are applied to various groups, including American Indians.

SS.G.6-8.5 Explain the role and impact of spatial patterns of settlement and movement in shaping societies and cultures, including Indigenous cultures.

SS.H.6-8.3 Analyze how, since European contact, historical events and policies have mutually impacted American Indian and European societies.

SS.H.6-8.8 Identify limitations and biases in primary and secondary sources, specifically regarding misinformation and stereotypes.

Materials

[*The Richest Hills: Mining in the Far West, 1862-1920*](#) PowerPoint by Nicholas Vrooman, Montana Historical Society.

[*“Sun Dance in Silver Bow: Urban Indian Poverty in the Shadow of the Richest Hill on Earth,”*](#) Montana Historical Society.

“The Cree Indian Nuisance,” Dupuyer, 1900. Acantha (Appendix A).

[*Montana’s Landless Indians and the Assimilation Era of Federal Indian Policy: A Case of Contradictions,*](#) Montana Historical Society and Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2018, p. 63-64.

Length

One class period



Steps

Note: there are a lot of sub-steps in this lesson plan, but the length is deceptive. Most of it consists of notes for you as you proceed through the slide deck of just 14 pictures, followed by reading a short article.

Step One

Engage students in a review of what they have learned and where they think the next two segments will go. Share the guiding questions for this lesson and ask students to predict the answer(s). They might do this in a discussion or on an index card or other written response.

Step Two

Project the slides from the PowerPoint by Nicholas Vrooman starting at Slide 61, through 67. Review these yourself beforehand and be prepared to ask students what they notice in the photographs. Notes for the slides are in the “Sun Dance in Silver Bow” lesson.

Step Three

Project the slides from the PowerPoint by Nichols Vrooman starting at Slide 68, through 74. Review these yourself beforehand and be prepared to ask students what they notice in the photographs. Your goal is to help students see the *people* in the story, not just the poverty and the discomfort. Yes, they are photos so most are smiling, but can students see what is good in their lives? What they value? Family, children, and community come to mind. Perhaps your students will also see other positive attributes in the photos that are worth noting and honoring. Notes for these are also in the Historical Society’s “Sun Dance in Silver Bow” lesson.

Step Four

Hand out the newspaper article from the *Dupuyer Acantha*.

Notes from the Montana Historical Society *Montana’s Landless Indians and the Assimilation Era Federal Indian Policy* unit regarding this article:

The Crees referred to in “The Cree Indian Nuisance” may have been Métis, who had several small communities on the Rocky Mountain Front, or they may have been Cree families wintering there. Historical accounts note that the groups of landless Indians who moved seasonally sometimes overlapped with one another at the same locations. Some of the Métis were less mobile than other landless people, as many of these families intended to establish permanent farming communities. The press seldom distinguished between them. Articles such as these three were not uncommon in the *Anaconda Standard*, reflecting Montanan’s racist attitudes.

Augustus Heinze, alluded to in “Resistance...” was a businessman who literally undermined the mines belonging to the Anaconda Company. Heinze was reviled by the Anaconda Company-owned newspaper.

Tom Power, also mentioned in this article, was a senator and businessman from Helena who supported Thomas Miles’s efforts to convince the government to deport the Cree in the 1890s.

The “white man’s burden” refers to the belief that white society had a responsibility to “civilize” other groups (most notably American Indians, Asians, and Africans) because of an assumed status of racial and cultural superiority.

Use the questions below in whatever way you see fit as you and the students work through this article. You might project them and have students answer them independently, work on them in pairs and then share with the group, or facilitate a whole-group response.

- In “The Cree Indian Nuisance,” Cree Indians were shown camped in the forest reserves, part of the public domain not open for settlement by homesteaders. How might these Cree people have responded to the article’s point of view?
- What words and phrases in the article reflect racist views?
- Why would the ranchers have feared landless Cree would kill and eat their stock? Why did the landless Indians and Métis sometimes resort to killing livestock? (Consider the impact on wildlife populations between 1850 and 1920 as fur traders, explorers, miners, ranchers, and homesteaders moved into Montana and the West.)

Assessment

Ask students to explain the way Landless Indians lived in the 20th century (both positive and negative).

Advanced: Ask students to explain the injustice of victim-blaming in the context of the Landless Indians.

Extension Option

This collection of obscure published references to [Hill 57 in Great Falls](#) is archived by Montana State University Bozeman. It is not suitable for reading cover-to-cover, but you might find some pieces that work for additional reading for your students. The short article on the very last page tells an abbreviated story that is worth noting if nothing else seems useful.

Also in the PDF, on page 17, is a succinct list of “Why Can’t the Hill 57 People Save for School Clothing and Supplies” from something called a “Workshop in Understanding.” This might be helpful for students to understand and apply to homeless/impooverished people in our own communities today.

Appendix A: The Cree Indian Nuisance

From the Dupuyer Acantha

About one year ago the Acantha found reason to call attention to the fact that a large number of Cree Indians had taken possession of the forest reserve west of town and were making themselves perfectly at home where a citizen of the United States was forbidden to trespass. The proper authorities took notice of the fact and realized that the presence of these Indians on the reservation was a violation of the law for the preservation of forests, as well as a menace to the peaceful enjoyment of the rights of property by our citizens. The appropriation for forest reserves had been exhausted, and red tape did the rest, so that the Indians remained in possession of what the Rounder aptly dubbed Utopia until spring revived their tendency to rove, when many left on their annual campaign against the slop barrels and garbage piles of the centers of population.

Now winter is back again, and the problem again presents itself: the Indians must eat in order to maintain their individual existence until the frost thaws out of their commissaries at the back doors in Great Falls and other large towns, and meanwhile the ranchman, in his struggle to provide for his family and pay his taxes, has to keep a watchful eye on his stock in the day time and has troubled dreams of the "white man's burden" at night.

This matter of the Crees has been the subject of a great deal of official correspondence and one governor of Montana made a trip to Washington in search of a solution of the problem, but the nuisance is still fastened upon us, and the forest reserve is again assuming the appearance of an Indian reservation for the winter. If the three prisoners in the Dupuyer jail should be convicted of cattle stealing, an example would be made, but the clamor of the hungry stomachs belonging to the rest of the tribe admits of no remedy by a plentiful supply of meat, and well the Indian knows that a little care on his part will allay his hunger and render a conviction practically impossible.