

A photograph of a herd of bison grazing in a vast, open grassland under a clear sky. The bison are dark brown with thick, shaggy fur. They are scattered across the field, with one in the foreground on the left, another on the right, and several others in the background. The grass is green and yellow, and the horizon is flat and distant.

Genocide Against the American Indian, Destruction of the Buffalo, & Imperialism in Iraq

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Thesis

- The war in Iraq, which is not necessarily genocidal per se,¹ nevertheless is an outgrowth of the same sorts of political, economic, and cultural choices that marked the genocide perpetrated by the United States against the American Indian and the destruction of the buffalo (the American bison).

To make this case, I will also argue:

- What happened to the American Indian was in fact genocide.
- The destruction of the buffalo happened primarily because of deliberate genocidal policies, although it also happened in part because of the colonial and imperial economic and cultural climate of the United States.
- While American Indian and buffalo populations are growing, that masks the ongoing abuse both populations suffer today.²
- The history of modern Iraq is an outgrowth of the same process, and the current war in Iraq exhibits striking parallels, whether we look at this from a liberal or a conservative point of view.

¹This is not to say that it's not genocidal. What is happening to the Sunni population of Iraq (much as what happened to the Kurds and Shiites under Saddam Hussein) may in fact be genocidal. It is to say that I am not prepared to make that argument here tonight. Certainly, genocide could be and often is the ultimate result of any imperialistic campaign.

²Unfortunately, time will not permit me also to argue adequately another crucial point. The genocide has never stopped. What has happened with the American Indian has nothing to do with a change in culture or an atonement for past wrongs. It has more to do with the need to preserve the reservation system in order to pursue other pernicious government policies, chief among them the nuclearization of American society. In the future, I hope to make that case more fully.

What is Genocide?

- Term “genocide” coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944,³ literally meaning the killing of a race, family, and tribe.
- While there is much debate over the meaning of the word “genocide”, it does not literally mean the killing of a particular “gene” pool; that is, genocide is not necessarily racially motivated. Also, as the following definitions make clear, genocide need not result in the annihilation of that group. Furthermore, an act may be called genocide even when the act itself falls short of direct murder.

³Wikipedia, “Raphael Lemkin,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_Lemkin, 2005.

Lemkin's Definition of Genocide

- “Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed at the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed at individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.”⁴

⁴Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, (Wash., D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79. Also in Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present*, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997).

UN Definition of Genocide

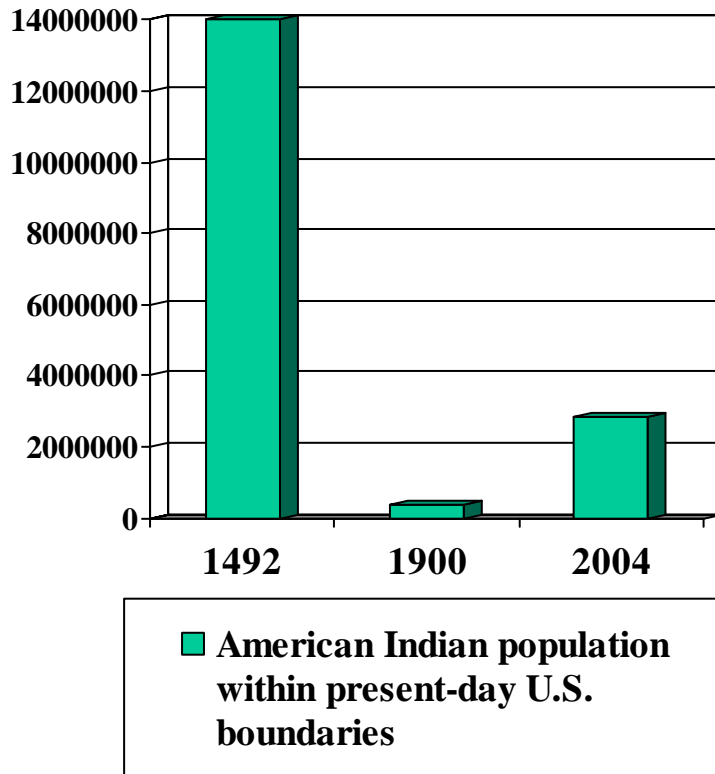
"any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:"

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁵

⁵United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, (New York, NY: United Nations, adopted 1948 and enacted 1951), Article 2. Most of the notion of cultural genocide, according to arguments by Churchill in *A Little Matter of Genocide*, had been stripped due to U.S. insistence. The U.S. refused to ratify the convention on genocide until 1988 (see <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10007095>), and even that ratification was so watered down by amendments brought by Jesse Helms, among others, that it effectively prevents the US from ever being prosecuted for past or future genocides (see Churchill).

American Indian Population

1492 - 2004



- According to the Smithsonian, only 2 million American Indians lived north of Mexico at the time of European expansion into the Americas.⁶
- More recent studies put that number between 12 – 18 million, mostly in the U.S.⁷
- By 1900, that number fell to 237,000 in the U.S., no more than 400,000 including Canada.⁸ That is a population decline of between 80% - 98%. The Nazi Holocaust of the Jews was only 66% albeit over a 12 year period.
- Today, the US Census Bureau estimates there are 2,824,751 American Indians in the U.S.⁹

⁶James Mooney of the Smithsonian in 1928 (posthumously) actually put that number at 1.1 million. See Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*.

⁷Numerous studies contradict the Smithsonian estimate, which itself increased its numbers by twofold in the 1980s. The most influential has been Henry F. Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal Populations," (*Current Anthology*, 7, 1966). For many more, see Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*.

⁸U.S. Census Bureau, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*: (Wash., DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930), Table II, "Indian Population by Divisions and States, 1890-1930.

⁹U.S. Census Bureau, "Annual Estimates of the Population by Race Alone and Hispanic or Latino Origin for the United States and States": (<http://www.census.gov/popest/states/asrh/tables/SC-EST2004-04.xls>, July 1, 2004).

What Caused Indian Population Decline?

- Disease
 - Especially smallpox. On the Great Plains, for instance, populations declined from 112,300 to 47,345 between 1780 and 1877, a reduction of 58%, with some farming tribes heavily affected by smallpox having population declines as much as 93%.¹⁰
- Warfare
 - This is rather well known. Scholars who have argued against genocide have noted the rather small numbers killed due to war relative to the population decrease. Of course, this fact is often true of genocides.
- Much lower life expectancy
 - The life expectancy of an Indian living on a reservation in the U.S. is 47 years, though is 71.1 years overall.¹¹

¹⁰Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 59.

¹¹Paula Gunn Allen, “All the Good Indians - the importance of record keeping for Native Americans,” in *Essence*, (April 1999): http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1264/is_12_29/ai_54256675. Also see Angela A.A. Willetto and Charlotte Goodluck, “Economic, Social, and Demographic Losses and Gains Among American Indians,” (Population Reference Bureau, January 2004): <http://www.prb.org/Template.cfm?Section=PRB&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=9809>.

Genocide Caused Dramatic American Indian Population Decline

- The effects of smallpox and other diseases on Indians were well known since the 16th century, and so claims that the decimation was an accident ring hollow. Besides documented cases, for example smallpox blankets, the sheer fact that settlers and authorities refused to take precautions against spreading the disease, not to mention refusing to occupy Indian land in the first place, is strong evidence that the diseases are evidence for rather than against genocide.¹²
- Warfare against Indians was often promoted by people calling for open extermination (see following slides).
- As we will see, the destruction of the buffalo was a perfect case in point of genocide, in this case of the Plains Indians.
- Whether we use Lemkin's definition, or the UN's more narrow definition, genocide occurred, whether we consider forced schooling, forced starvation, dramatic changes to the way of life introduced by the treaties,¹³ or the open annihilations of peaceful Indians that occurred in places like Sand Creek and Wounded Knee (for more, see following slides).
- Current life expectancy tied to high rates of alcoholism (also introduced to reservations via unbalanced trade relations), unemployment (Pine Ridge unemployment stands at nearly 80%, for instance),¹⁴ diseases related to economic conditions, violence related to economic and social conditions, nuclearization of many reservations, and much more.¹⁵

¹²Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 138-9. In fact, smallpox epidemics were often celebrated by Europeans and American colonists.

¹³Treaties often included language openly calling for Indians to take on "white" agricultural ways of life. On this, see as one example, Francis Paul, Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

¹⁴For one example of evidence, see Carson Walker, "Bus service bound for reservation," in *The Rapid City Journal*, July 11, 2005, <http://www.rapidcityjournal.com/articles/2005/07/11/news/local/news03.txt>. The average annual income at Pine Ridge is \$3,700.

¹⁵Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 289-362.

American Leaders on the American Indian

- “For I repeat it, again, and I am clear in my opinion, that policy and economy point very strongly to the expediency of being upon good terms with the Indians, and the propriety of purchasing their Lands in preference to attempting to drive them by force of arms out of their Country; which as we have already experienced is like driving the Wild Beasts of the Forest which will return as soon as the pursuit is at an end and fall perhaps on those that are left there; when the gradual extension of our Settlements will as certainly cause the Savage as the Wolf to retire; both being beasts of prey tho’ they differ in shape. In a word there is nothing to be obtained by an Indian War but the Soil they live on and this can be had by purchase at less expense, and without that bloodshed, and those distresses which helpless Women and Children are made partakers of in all kinds of disputes with them.” – George Washington, *Letter to James Duane*, September 7, 1783, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=359>
- “...if ever we are constrained to lift the hatchet against any tribe we will never lay it down til that tribe is exterminated, or driven beyond the Mississippi...in war they will kill some of us; But we will destroy all of - them. Adjuring them, therefore, if they wish to remain on the land which covers the bones of their fathers, to keep the peace with a people who ask their friendship without needing it, who wish to avoid war without fearing it. In war, they will kill some of us; we shall destroy all of them.” – Thomas Jefferson, “To the Secretary at War [Henry Dearborn],” August 28, 1807, http://oll.libertyfund.org/Texts/Jefferson0136/Works/Vol10/0054-10_Pt06_1807.html#hd_lf054-10_head_202
- “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.” – attributed to Gen. Phil Sheridan, January 1869, http://www.everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1137096.
- “I suppose I should be ashamed to say that I take the Western view of the Indian. I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth.” – Theodore Roosevelt, January 1886, *Ibid*.

Sand Creek Massacre

- On November 29, 1864, U.S. troops under Col. John M. Chivington massacred at least 150 Cheyenne and Arapaho who believed they were under the protection of the U.S. Army. This massacre was in large part perpetrated because of an exterminationist frenzy whipped up by the territorial governor of Colorado and the Denver newspaper, *The Rocky Mountain News*.
- "They are a dissolute, vagabondish, brutal, and ungrateful race and ought to be wiped from the face of the earth." – *Rocky Mountain News*, "Exterminate Them!", editorial, March 24, 1863.
- "My intention is to kill all Indians I may come across." – Col. John M. Chivington, Quoted in Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*.
- "Nits make lice." – Col. John M. Chivington, Ibid. (also said at other times by William Tecumseh Sherman – note the name – and John Seveir, both Indian fighters, see <http://www.mohicanpress.com/wwwboard/messages14/6534.html>).
- "Of from five to six hundred souls [who were killed], the majority of which were women and children...I did not see a body of a man, woman, or child but was scalped, and in many instances their bodies were mutilated in a most horrible manner—men, women and children's privates cut out, &c; I heard one man say that he had cut out a woman's private parts and had them for exhibition on a stick; I heard another man say he had cut off the fingers of an Indian to get the rings on the hand...I also heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females and stretched them over the saddle bows and wore them over hats while riding in the ranks...I heard one man say that he had cut a squaw's heart out, and he had it stuck up on a stick." – a lieutenant in the New Mexico Volunteers, testifying on the Sand Creek Massacre. Quoted in Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*.
- Sand Creek is only one of many examples of genocidal behavior and atrocities committed by the United States, or by the colonies before independence. Most colonies, for instance, had scalp bounties on any head of an enemy Indian. Since it was impossible to tell a friendly Indian from an enemy Indian, many Indians were killed for the bounty on their heads. Ibid., 180-8.

Wounded Knee



- On December 29, 1890, American troops under Gen. Nelson Miles butchered hundreds of Sioux Indians. The Indians were persecuted for practicing the “Ghost Dance”, which taught that the Indians’ dead ancestors would return and that the white people would disappear.¹⁶
- “Many Americans wanted more Indians to die. One citizen wrote the Secretary of War to propose ‘establishing an electric plant at Pine Ridge and stretching a wire around the hostile camp. Then, turning on the current, the Indians are to be driven down to the wire, which is to be drawn closer and closer. Contact...would cause general death.’ Retired General William Tecumseh Sherman...wrote his niece, [Gen. Nelson] Miles’s wife Mary, that the more Sioux her husband ‘kills now, the less he will have to do later.’”¹⁷

¹⁶Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 359-60.

Mass burial of Indians at Wounded Knee

Genocide & Near Extinction of Buffalo

- The story of the near extinction of the buffalo is a perfect case in point how imperialism promoted genocide against the American Indian.
- In 1800, the best estimates show between 30 million and 40 million bison in the Great Plains.¹⁸ By 1902, there were approximately 750 in the entire U.S.¹⁹

¹⁸Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 24-25. Isenberg makes a convincing argument why an earlier number of 75 million, argued for by Ernest Thompson Seton in 1929, overestimates the number significantly.

¹⁹David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1989), 234. A herd in Yellowstone National Park, well outside the Great Plains and prime buffalo habitat, had been reduced by poaching to 22 by the same year. See Aubrey Haines, *The Yellowstone Story, Volume Two*, (Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, 1977), Appendix C, Table V, 483.

What is a Buffalo?

- The buffalo, or American bison (*bison bison*), is a large mammal that became dominant on the Great Plains about 5,000 years ago after the extinction of larger versions of the species as well as other larger mammals (like the mammoth).²⁰ Though some claim that there were smaller subspecies called the wood buffalo and mountain buffalo, most scientists today believe those so-called subspecies were no different than the buffalo that existed on the Great Plains.²¹
- A full grown female buffalo often weighs between 700 – 1200 pounds while a full grown male can be upwards of 1 ton, though is usually between 1500-1800 pounds. A buffalo bull typically is about 5 to 6 feet high at the shoulder and 9 to 10 feet long. Their diet consists almost entirely of grass, particularly shortgrass. In fact, the buffalo formed something of a symbiotic relationship with the western plains shortgrasses because the chips helped re-fertilize the soil.²²
- Buffalo can run at speeds up to 40 mph.²³



A lone bull in Yellowstone National Park



A calf feeding in Yellowstone National Park. Note how similar cows and bulls appear. However, the cow is much more likely to be with the herd.

²⁰Llewellyn L. Manske, "Prehistorical Conditions of Rangelands in the Northern Great Plains," in *2000 Annual Report*, (Dickinson, ND: Dickinson Research Extension Center, 2000), <http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/dickinson/research/1999/range99e.htm>.

²¹Valerius Geist, *Buffalo Nation: History and Legend of the North American Bison*, (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 1996), 58-60.

²²Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 22.

²³Ibid.



“We were dancing. We were dancing on the plain. We’re looking through the window didn’t see any buffalo there.” – Midnight Oil, “Stars of Warburton,” 1990.

Prelude to a Mass Slaughter

- Buffalo populations exploded in the 17th and 18th centuries, expanding to both coasts. This expansion happened in large part because Indian populations along the coasts had been decimated by disease and war. By 1820, almost all bison east of the Mississippi had been slaughtered.²⁴
- Prior to the mid-18th century, buffalo hunting had mostly been dominated by agriculturalists, who went on buffalo hunts seasonally. These hunts happened on foot.²⁵
- Nomadic tribes, such as the Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, Arapaho, Comanche, Blackfeet, Kiowa, and others began dominating the Great Plains in the late-18th century after disease began decimating the agriculturalists, and after the horse trade began in earnest.²⁶
- Trade became an increasing reality in the life of the Great Plains Indians. First, it was the trade in beaver fur and horses. While the nomads at first were resistant to trade due to their way of life, factors changed over time that led to greater stress on the buffalo population and greater reliance by the nomads upon the buffalo:

That conquest was a cooperative enterprise. Horses and smallpox – an Old World animal and an Old World disease – destroyed the dominance of the Missouri River villagers and levered the nomads to power in the grasslands. The ecological and economic forces brought by the Europeans were intertwined. Trade brought the horse to the plains. Smallpox largely affected the villages where Euroamerican fur traders concentrated their activities. Trade in horses, furs, and foodstuffs furthered the specialization of the nomads as bison hunters. The arrival of the fur traders led to the destruction of the beaver. In the eighteenth-century plains, ecological and economic changes were inseparable.²⁷

²⁴Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 18.

²⁵Ibid., 56-8. Also, Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 31-62, and Valerius Geist, *Buffalo Nation*, 36-48.

²⁶Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 39-47, 59-60. There is a legend that horses simply appeared on the Great Plains, having escaped from the Spanish. Isenberg, however, argues convincingly that this is false. And, even if true, the discovery of horses would not have taught the Indians horsemanship. Rather, the advent of the horse was a result of trade with the Spanish, who themselves desired to dominate the North American continent.

²⁷Ibid., 61.

Prelude to a Mass Slaughter II

- Buffalo hunting in the early 19th century by nomadic plains tribes may have been sustainable, but when the buffalo fur trade exploded in the middle decades of the century, buffalo populations may have begun decreasing.
 - Buffalo, which had previously been used for subsistence, now were a commodity on Eastern markets, mostly for their robes.²⁸
 - Indians traded buffalo fur for exorbitant prices for goods at trading posts.²⁹
 - Greater trade and encroachment of American settlers led to disease epidemics, diseases that the nomadic tribes had largely avoided the prior century.³⁰
 - The de-centralized governing structure of Plains nomads began to break down as chiefs began accumulating greater status in society and as disease and specialization of labor revolutionized the nomadic societies.³¹
- Drought may have had some effect on buffalo populations.³²
- Even so, whatever decrease in buffalo population was minimal compared to the mass slaughter perpetrated by the United States in the 1860s and 1870s. Furthermore, what decrease had happened resulted in large part from pressures of American expansion and previous European colonialization, an expansion that Americans and Europeans had felt fully justified in pursuing.

²⁸Ibid., 93-102.

²⁹Ibid. For more on the prices for the robe trade after the mass slaughter had begun in earnest, see Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 91-2.

³⁰Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Buffalo*, 113-20

³¹Ibid., 97-103

³²Geist, *Buffalo Nation*, 70. Isenberg pays a lot of attention to environmental factors but ultimately minimizes them, playing up instead economic and cultural factors, 129-30.

Mass Slaughter: A Brief Pictorial

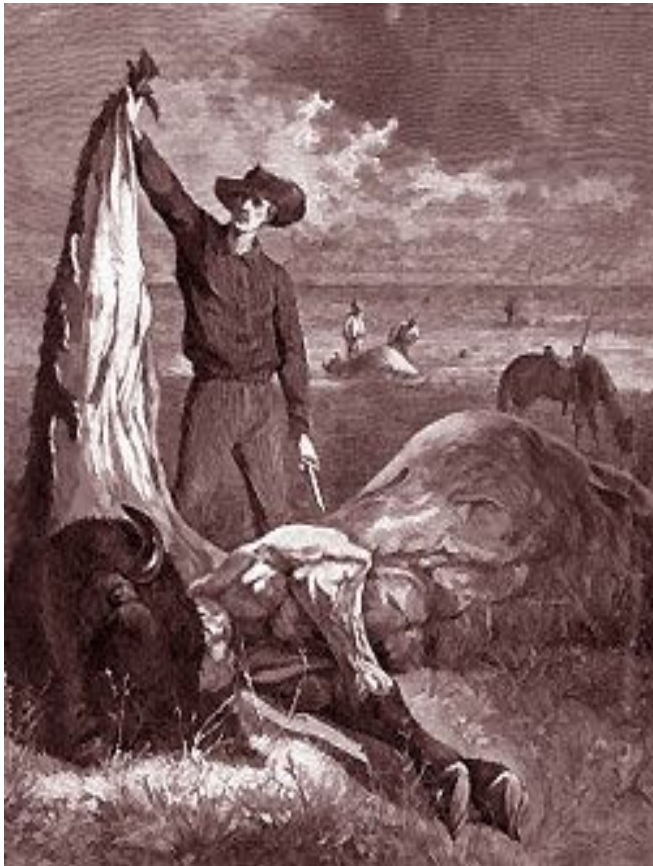


Illustration from *Harper's Weekly*: A dead buffalo Hide.



Image from National Park Service. Gen. Phil Sheridan. Encouraged the buffalo slaughter as military policy, later worked to save Yellowstone buffalo.



Image from Kansas State Historical Society. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Indian fighter, buffalo killer, showman and maker of the Western myth.



Image from New York Public Library. After the slaughter, bison bone business was huge.



Image from Austin History Center. Buffalo Tannery.

Another Perspective



Image from Clark's Art



Image from chriscorrigan.com

- “You people make a big talk, and sometimes war, if an Indian kills a white man’s ox to keep his wife and children from starving. What do you think my people ought to say and do when they themselves see their cattle [buffalo] killed by your race when they are not hungry?” – Cheyenne Chief Little Robe, in Washington, DC, 1870s.³³
- “We did not ask you white men to come here. The Great Spirit gave us this country as a home. You had yours. We did not interfere with you. The Great Spirit gave us plenty of land to live on, and buffalo, deer, antelope and other game. But you came here; you are taking my land from me; you are killing off our game, so it is hard for us to live. Now, you tell us to work for a living, but the Great Spirit did not make us to work, but to live by hunting. You white men can work if you want to. We do not interfere with you, and again you say, why do you not become civilized? We do not want your civilization! We would live as our fathers did, and their fathers before them.” – Oglala Sioux Chief Crazy Horse, 1870s.³⁴

³³Quoted in Geist, *Buffalo Nation*, 86.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 83.

Mass Slaughter

- After the Civil War, mass slaughter of the buffalo herds was official policy of the U.S. government, especially the U.S. military under the direction of Gen. Sherman and Gen. Sheridan.³⁵ In the 1870s that policy was supported by the Grant Administration, often in the person of Secretary of the Interior John Delano. Where some legislatures and Congress had offered up bills attempting at least some protection for the buffalo, the aforementioned forces teamed up to stop them. Look for instance at how James Garfield, then Speaker of the House, defended the view that however cruel, the buffalo slaughter was at least driving the nomadic Indians into the reservation:

If the barbarism of killing buffalo for mere wanton sport has any compensation in it, perhaps it may be this is a compensation worthy of our consideration.³⁶

Delano himself wrote:

[W]henever it is found that any tribe or band of Indians persistently refuse to go upon a reservation and determine to continue their nomadic habits...then the policy contemplates the treatment of such tribe or band with all needed severity...thereby teaching them that it is better to follow the advice of the government...The rapid disappearance of game from the former hunting-grounds must operate largely in favor of our efforts to confine the Indians to smaller areas, and compel them to abandon their nomadic customs.³⁷

Here is Sheridan before the Texas legislature in 1875 speaking against a bill to protect the buffalo:

[The buffalo hunters] have done in the last two years and will do more in the next year to settle the vexed Indian question, than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years. They are destroying the Indian's commissary, and it is a well-known fact that an army losing its base of supplies is placed at a great disadvantage. Send them powder and lead, if you will; for the sake of a lasting peace, let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated.³⁸

³⁵More on Phil Sheridan and his role with the bison in Jim Macdonald, "The Founding of Yellowstone into Law and into Fact," senior thesis for Ohio Northern University history department, 1996, revised 1998, <http://www.yellowstone-online.com/paper.html>.

³⁶Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 151.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 151-2.

³⁸Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 129.

Mass Slaughter II

- The military usually contracted out to private citizens, or more accurately in most cases simply allowed and encouraged private citizens, to destroy massive herds of buffalo, made easier by improvements in rifle technology. This was often in direct violation of previous Indian treaties.³⁹
- Between 1872-1874 *in the Dodge City, Kansas, area alone*, Frank Mayer reported that 3,158,730 buffalo had been killed (not including 1,215,000 estimated to have been killed by Indians.)⁴⁰
- The gold rush of the 1840s had been replaced by a buffalo hide rush in the 1870s, especially as demand for buffalo leather from tanneries in the U.S. and U.K. exploded.⁴¹
- By the early 1880s, the buffalo slaughter was complete. All that was left was to pick the bones, literally. The Great Plains was littered with buffalo bones. In many cases, the bones were shipped to fertilizer plants in Michigan.⁴²
- By the late 1870s, the nomadic Indian tribes had given up, not defeated militarily so much as defeated culturally and economically. Crazy Horse gave up, and Sitting Bull fled to Canada. Before 1880, Crazy Horse was dead, and just before the Wounded Knee Massacre, Sitting Bull had been killed as well.⁴³
- By the 1880s, some of the buffalo hunters openly called for saving the remaining buffalo, nostalgic for the era which had just past. The organization that “saved the buffalo,” mostly by domesticating the species, called “American Bison Society,” was dominated by wealthy Eastern males, among them Theodore Roosevelt.⁴⁴

³⁹Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Buffalo*, 123-9. Also, for more on the treaty provisions, especially Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868, see Prucha, *American Indian Treaties*.

⁴⁰Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 96.

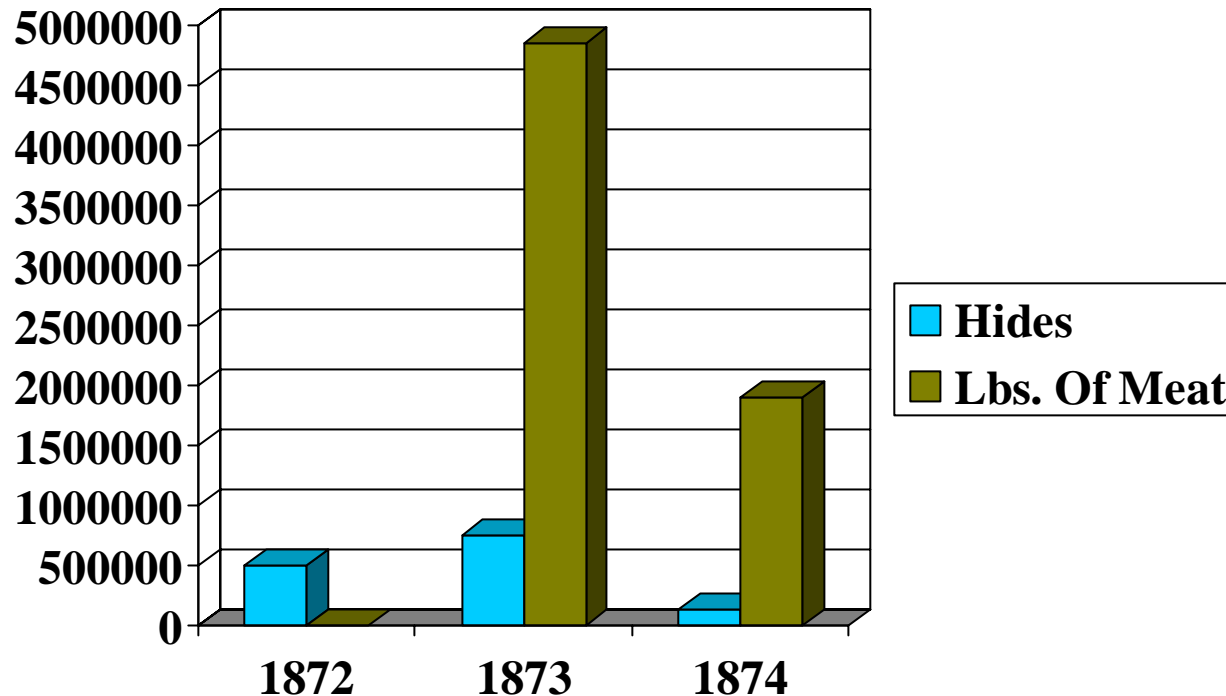
⁴¹Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 132. See also Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 94-5.

⁴²Geist, *Buffalo Nation*, 80. The 1880 picture from the Michigan Carbon Works of bison bones towers more than 50 feet.

⁴³Crazy Horse was killed September 5, 1877. Sitting Bull was killed December 15, 1890.

⁴⁴For an excellent analysis, see Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 164-92. For a more mainstream viewpoint, see Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 235-40.

Railroad Buffalo Shipments in Dodge City area



Adapted from Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 96. This is just Dodge City, Kansas. Buffalo disappeared from the southern Great Plains before the northern Great Plains. The sudden drop off from 1873 to 1874 is not an anomaly, as the hide trade shifted in intensity from the southern Plains to the northern Plains until the buffalo was nearly extinct. Note also that the number of buffalo killed was much greater than the number of hides produced.

Buffalo Are Not Endangered?

- Today, there are more than 300,000 buffalo, at least 15,000 of which are considered genetically pure enough to carry on the species (meaning that the herd has not been genetically mixed with cattle),⁴⁵ a far cry from the 30,000,000 that once roamed the Great Plains. In the last two decades, the buffalo population has exploded such that more buffalo are slaughtered as livestock every year than exist in the public herds.⁴⁶ Of the 15,000 genetically pure bison, over 4,000 live in Yellowstone National Park, which is not on the Great Plains and not prime buffalo habitat.
- Buffalo are not technically an endangered species. Even so, numbers are few in the wild, and they remain virtually non-existent as free roaming herds on the Great Plains. Yellowstone buffalo, which have become afflicted with brucellosis, have been under attack by the Department of the Interior and the State of Montana. Almost every year since 1997, buffalo leaving Yellowstone have been tested for brucellosis and slaughtered, most winters by the hundreds, once by more than one thousand. The current wildlife management plan for Yellowstone buffalo calls for a herd of 3,000. Since the herd is now over 3,000, the government is allowed to and does ship buffalo for slaughter without even testing for brucellosis.⁴⁷
- Buffalo have essentially been domesticated and suffer from a gene pool that is remarkably low in diversity.⁴⁸ Buffalo were wild animals; they have in almost every case either been domesticated or fenced into narrow park boundaries. Buffalo are not only endangered; they have been essentially destroyed as the species they once were.

⁴⁵Scott McMillion, "Substantial portion of remaining 'pure' bison in Yellowstone," in *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, April 24, 2002. See <http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/media/newsarchive0102/042402.html>. Some would dispute that total as overblown, considering that mixing cattle with buffalo was never particularly successful.

⁴⁶Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 189.

⁴⁷For much more, see Buffalo Field Campaign at <http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org>. For an opposing view, see United States Department of Agriculture, "Brucellosis and Yellowstone Bison," 2004, at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahps/brucellosis/cattle.htm>.

⁴⁸Geist, *Buffalo Nation*, 114-23.

Connecting Indian Genocide to Buffalo Destruction

- The destruction of the buffalo gives us one narrative of how the United States perpetrated genocide against the American Indian, though in that one narrative are many genocidal examples.
- The genocide and destruction was at times direct, at times indirect. Sometimes, whole people and animals were slaughtered. Sometimes, economic and cultural forces led to the death of a people and of a species.
- Whether we are talking about the high unemployment, disease rates, life expectancy of the Indians and the nuclearization of the reservations, or whether we are talking about the ongoing assault on the buffalo, the increasing numbers of both populations are more a byproduct of the same forces at work, rather than a change of heart.
 - For instance, in the late 19th century, those who urged a more humanitarian approach with the Indians urged assimilation, often under the phrase, “Kill the Indian; save the man.” The government forced children into compulsory education far from home. The extinction of the Indian was considered inevitable. Assimilation was written into Indian treaties. However, when the reservations became necessary to preserve for the government’s nuclear ambitions, a net result was that preservation of the Indians became necessary for larger imperial ambitions. Likewise, buffalo have thrived only because they have been integrated into the domestic livestock and tourist economy. Where buffalo cross the boundary outside of that economy, they remain threatened.

Imperialism in Iraq

How does American imperialism in Iraq connect with Indian genocide and buffalo destruction?



What is Imperialism?

- According to Dictionary.LaborLawTalk.com, imperialism is “the policy of extending the control or authority over foreign entities as a means of acquisition and/or maintenance of empires, either through direct territorial control or through indirect methods of exerting control on the politics and/or economy of other countries. The term is used by some to describe the policy of a country in maintaining colonies and dominance over distant lands, regardless of whether the country calls itself an empire.” (See <http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/Imperialism>).
- U.S. American Indian policy has been dominated by one consequence of imperialism called *colonialism*, which according to one definition “makes explicit the fact that expansion almost always involves conquest, displacement, and rule over foreign groups.”⁴⁹
- Imperialism is behind U.S. policy in Iraq, though not necessarily colonialism. The government in Baghdad, the U.S. hopes, will do the bidding economically, politically, and culturally according to the aims of the United States. However, the United States is not necessarily colonizing Iraq, at least entirely. There have been attempts to take over the Iraqi oil industry, and the military serves as a *de facto* secondary government in Iraq. However, indirect means are also used (for instance, the use of the World Bank in affairs related to the Iraqi debt.).
- Nevertheless, the same basic policy considerations drive U.S. policy in Iraq as has driven U.S. policy toward the American Indian.

⁴⁹Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism*, 2. Churchill characterizes today’s policy on the reservations as “internal colonialism.”

When Did Imperialism in Iraq Begin?

- Did imperialism in Iraq begin with the George W. Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq, based on the trumped up charges of weapons of mass destruction, in 2003? The George H.W. Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq, based apparently to liberate Kuwait, in 1991? Let's go much further back. Did imperialism begin with the British in 1918? Well, no. The land which is now Iraq has been the home of empires ever since the dawn of civilization more than 5,000 years ago. Whether we are talking about the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, the Persians, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Mongols, the Ottomans, the British, or the Americans, it seems that imperialists have always had their eyes on Babylon, and now Iraq.⁵⁰
- American imperialism in Iraq goes at least back to the start of the Cold War (1945), when the Soviet Union and the United States competed for influence in Iraq after World War II had left the British Empire in tatters.
- The United States helped support the Iraqi war with Iran during the 1980s and turned a blind eye toward Saddam Hussein and Iraq, even when Saddam used chemical weapons against the Iranians and against the Kurdish minority in the north of Iraq. The U.S. even helped arm Saddam Hussein with those weapons.⁵¹ In any event, American imperialist influence in Iraq lasted long before 1991 and 2003. Politically, Iraq occupied strategic ground in the Middle East. Economically, the British first and then the Americans realized the value of Iraqi oil. Iraq has the second largest amount of the world's known oil reserves.⁵² Culturally, the United States has continued to perpetrate the war on Iraq for cultural reasons, in order to *give the Iraqis* American-style "freedom" and "democracy."

⁵⁰See a chronology online at <http://www.angelfire.com/nt/Gilgamesh/history.html>. For a brief history of the British in Iraq, see Derek Hopwood, "British Relations with Iraq," *BBC*, October 2, 2003, at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/iraq/britain_iraq_01.shtml.

⁵¹Norm Dixon, "How Ronald Reagan Armed Saddam with Chemical Weapons," in *counterpunch*, June 17, 2004, <http://counterpunch.org/dixon06172004.html>.

⁵²See "Map & Graph: Energy: Oil Reserves," January 1, 2002, http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/ene_oil_res.

Evidence of Current American Imperialism in Iraq

- The United States and its allies have an occupying army in Iraq. The United States uses its armies to fight elements working against the governmental system that it helped install and uses its armies to train an army and a police force loyal to the aims of the United States and the government it has installed.
- Economically, large contracts have been given to U.S. contractors, associated with the U.S. government, like Bechtel, Halliburton, and the Carlyle group. Prominent U.S. politicians like Vice President Cheney and former U.S. Secretary of State, and subsequently envoy on Iraq's debt, James Baker, have had or have ongoing relationships with these corporations, who among other things, have had their hands on Iraqi oil.⁵³
- Culturally, the United States is there to promote American style democracy and freedom and openly admits that it is in the process of building democratic institutions in the nation. Whether or not the goal is admirable, and whatever the results, the aim is openly imperial. The theory of the U.S. government is that a free market democracy will not make war on the United States or allies like Israel.⁵⁴
- The United States has used institutions that it has a prominent voice in, like the World Bank where Iraq war architect Paul Wolfowitz is now President, to exert its pressure on the Iraqi government and its influence on the Iraqi government in its relationship with the World Bank.⁵⁵

⁵³For more on James Baker's double role as a diplomatic envoy working on Iraq's behalf and his relationship with the private defense industry, see Naomi Klein, "James Baker's Double Life: A Special Investigation," in *The Nation*, October 12, 2004, at <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20041101/klein>. Greg Palast has also investigated this connection heavily. See "President's Business Partner Slices Up Iraq," December 8, 2003, at <http://www.gregpalast.com/detail.cfm?artid=300&row=1>.

⁵⁴George W. Bush himself expresses this theory in, "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East," Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, November 6, 2003, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>.

⁵⁵A rather self evident way the Bank works can be seen in its own press release, "World Bank To Extend First Lending To Iraq In Three Decades," July 18, 2005, at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/IRAQEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20585718~menuPK:313111~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:313105,00.html>.

Conservative or Liberal?

It's still Imperialism

- The conservative policy in Iraq can be characterized by the current Bush Administration policy that not only sees a military solution in Iraq but a peculiarly American military solution in Iraq. Sometimes, this conservatism is called neoconservatism, in that the policy is not isolationist and relies heavily on a big government solution to the foreign policy crisis. Unfortunately, there is nothing new about this conservatism since the same policy considerations dominated American Indian policy in the 19th century, not to mention American policy toward the Western Hemisphere, which had been dominated by the Monroe Doctrine. While many Americans considered the Indian question a domestic problem, the unilateral military approach marked the policy pursued by the Republican administrations following the Civil War in dealing with the Indian question.
- A liberal policy in Iraq is harder to characterize. In some cases, it means a multi-lateral approach to Iraq. This was the policy pushed forward by 2004 Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry. In this approach, the United States shares the burden of the military war and occupation of Iraq, and therefore the decision-making regarding Iraqi policy, with key allies. Sometimes, at the further extreme of liberalism, represented by people like Dennis Kucinich, it means United Nations intervention and stewardship in Iraq. But, in so far as the United Nations is largely under the control of the UN Security Council and its five permanent members, dominated by the United States and its allies, the solution remains largely imperial.
- The goal remains generally the same; the tactics toward that goal are different. Both liberals and conservatives seek U.S. hegemony in the Middle East, whether that hegemony is shared with other free market allies or whether it is pursued by the United States alone. In both cases, someone needs “to do something” for Iraq, and in both cases, Iraqi oil is at issue. Though liberals urge alternative energy sources, that only transfers the object of imperialism to some other resource by some other means, though the basic assumption that “we should have an unlimited supply of energy” remains unchallenged. It would be as if we said that we should not take away more land for slave states but should instead exploit the immigrant wage labor we have on hand. Or, more to the point, it is as though we should not make war on Indians and therefore use up the precious commodity of our soldiers but should instead consider taking the land by treaty and showing the Indians the blessings of the American way of life.

Parallels Between Indian Genocide, Buffalo Destruction, & Imperialism in Iraq

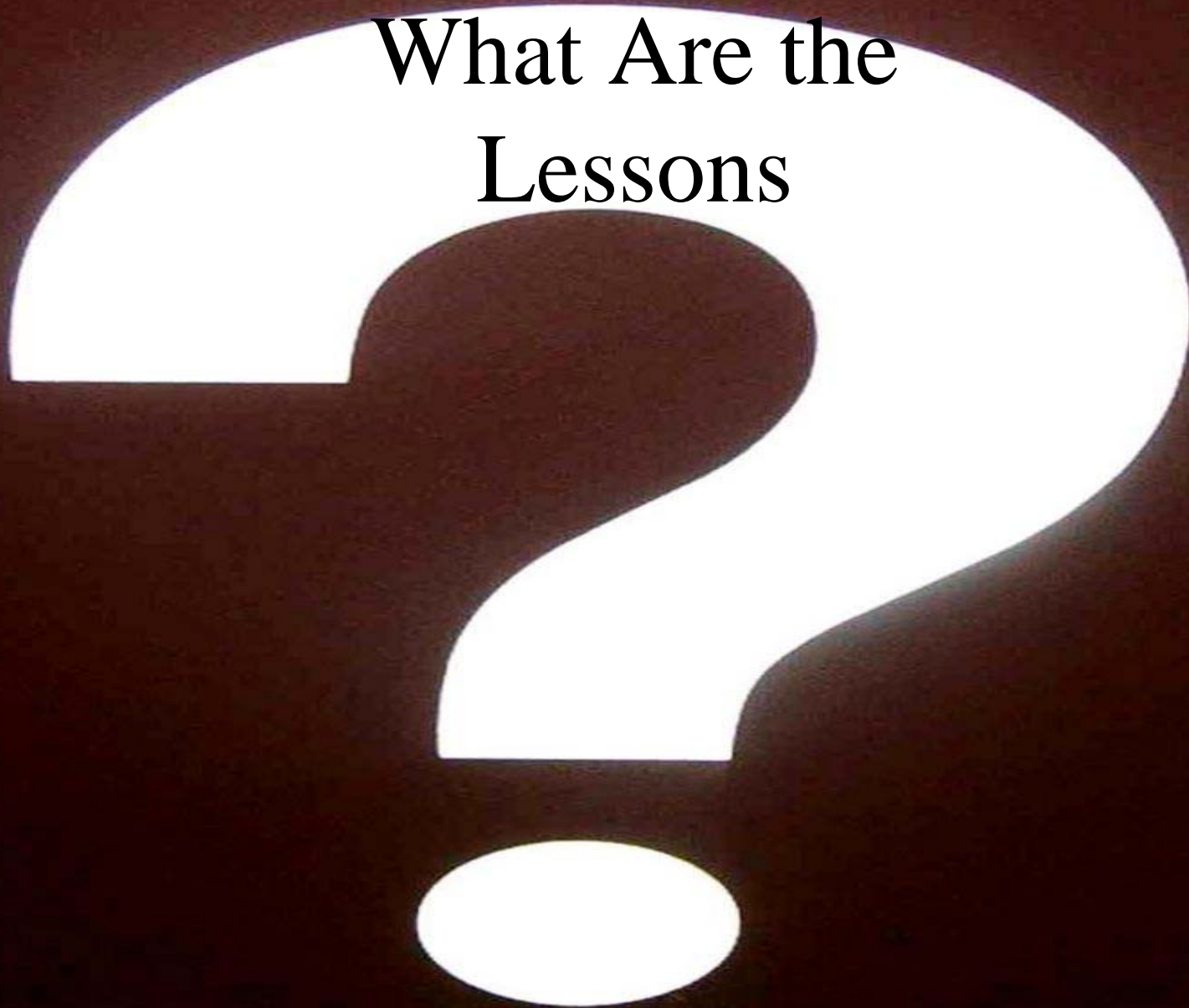
Indian Genocide & Buffalo Destruction

- An unbalanced political and trade relationship as evidenced by the size of the U.S., its technological advantage, its greater number of trading partners, and its superior military strength;
- Nomadic Indian society in the Great Plains was overly dependent on the buffalo for the life of its economy; this dependence was easy to exploit;
- Destruction of the bison herds essentially insured future dependence on the American Indians upon the United States;
- When not openly exterminationist, the United States claimed that it was on a humanitarian mission to civilize American Indian society and “save the man from the Indian.” That assimilation is still genocidal, at least according to Lemkin’s definition.

Imperialism in Iraq

- An unbalanced political and trade relationship as evidenced by the size of the U.S., its technological advantage, its greater number of trading partners, and its superior military strength;
- Iraqi society is overly dependent on oil for the life of its economy; this dependence has been easy to exploit;
- Attempts to control Iraqi oil, if successful, will guarantee Iraqi dependence on the United States;
- While not as openly racist, the U.S. attempts to “civilize” the world’s oldest civilization by bringing “democracy” and “freedom,” thus promoting Americanism in an attempt to destroy what might be called “Iraqism.” Is it genocidal? Perhaps, not, but might it be in the future?

What Are the
Lessons



Lesson 1: Iraq is Nothing New

- September 11 may have changed airport security and may have changed the present political climate, but it did not change the way nation states like the United States pursue policy against states or people who stand in its way. The United States has long perpetrated genocide against the American Indian as well as a policy of imperialist and colonialist expansion. Euroamerican policies reduced the American Indian by 80-98% and the buffalo by more than 99%. Both sets of victims continue to suffer today at the hands of those policies, which are ongoing. The war in Iraq should be seen through a more robust prism of American history.

Lesson 2: Our History is Ongoing

- Very few people acknowledge that the history that has afflicted the American Indian and the buffalo continues today. So, they fail to connect those issues to today's current problems. We must note that the tragic history is ongoing because the same processes that produced the tragedy continue to produce tragedy. Indians suffer from low life expectancy, high rates of disease, high unemployment, a low standard of living, and barely a thread of the life and customs that have made up Indian self-identity. Likewise, buffalo continue to be harassed, slaughtered, and to have their wild nature subsumed by the domestic economy that we live in and support. How can any analysis of the tragedies in Iraq fail to consider the processes that have produced those tragedies?

What's Left Unsaid

- I have argued that the United States perpetrated genocide against the American Indian and purposefully destroyed the buffalo as part of that genocide. Furthermore, I argued that U.S. imperialism in Iraq comes from the same cloth as the previous and ongoing genocide. What I have not offered are ways to resist these crimes and processes. That is for us to figure out. I plead, however, that we incorporate the struggle of the American Indian, especially as exemplified by the plight of the buffalo, into our fight. I also ask that in our organizing that we are careful not to imitate imperialistic processes, no matter the scale, in our dealings with each other. If we do, I guarantee that the tragedies will continue unabated until we all suffer the consequences.

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- Photos on Slide 1, 13, and 14 by Jim Macdonald, May 2005. Slide 1 show bison in Badlands National Park in South Dakota. Slide 13 was taken on I-90 above the banks of the Missouri River near Chamberlain, SD. The photo of the bull in Yellowstone is in the parking lot near the Mud Volcano area. The picture of the calf and cow was taken on the road between Madison Junction and Old Faithful.