**Condensed Article**

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**American Experience: Native Americans**

**What was the West like before white settlers came?**The world [American Indians](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/) in the West had existed for several centuries. The 18th century, in particular, represents the West as we think about it before the arrival of the white man. This enormous area of the Great Plains, Southwest, Pacific Northwest, and Basin area represented the homelands of many Indian communities. At least 28 tribes might be called “Plains Indians”. Trade alliances existed among these peoples, and protecting hunting domains was important to their economy, depending on the natural resources of the environment, which included antelope and smaller game. North American Indians shared their world with two types of buffalo (plains and wood), eight species of bear, 3 primary species of wolves, 59 species of eagle, 150 species of antelope and 38 species of deer.

**How did white settlers affect that world?**  
The world of the American Indian changed with the coming of the white man! In some of the prophecies and stories, it is thought that it was meant to be. The white strangers were different, very different, but both races would learn from each other.

Anglo-American settlers of England, Spain, France, Russia, Sweden and the Netherlands began to change native America during the early 1500s. Closely following these monetary explorations, Christianity was introduced and missionaries often accompanied the European explorers during the mid-1500s and late-1500s. European usage of metal tools altered Indian ways of life, especially as the gun, or rifle, and the plow, meant the European colonies were deliberately planned to settle the so-called New World. The European presence introduced at least a dozen strange diseases during this era that American Indians had no natural immunity against. The native population suffered enormous losses. It has been said that more native people died due to foreign diseases than were lost in wars fighting for their homelands.

The "white intruders" brought much change to Indian people. Who is to say that it was not meant to be that way? Yes, all of the North American continent has been taken away, except for about two percent that American Indians still have that they call their homelands. The American Indian almost disappeared with the buffalo when less than a thousand buffalo were left by the turn of the 20th century, and only 225,000 Indians had survived the deadly new diseases and more than 1,000 wars. But life was hard; it was never meant to be easy -- not for anyone! Perhaps, that is what all of us must learn for the 21st century. That we should not waste our natural resources and that we should value the natural environment, or else we will destroy ourselves.