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War in the West: The immediate and lasting effects of the conflicts between the Navajo and the U.S. in the mid-18th century.

Question: What were the negative impacts of the wars between the United States and the Navajo peoples on Navajo way of life and how have they had a lasting impact on today’s Navajo?

Introduction/Summary

* This poster will look to examine how the conflicts between the U.S. government and the Navajo Nation from 1851-1864 influenced the Navajo quality of life both at the time of the conflicts and in the present day.
* Fort Defiance was built on Navajo land after Col. Edwin Sumner’s military campaign against them in 1851.
* A treaty was signed between the U.S. Military and Chief Manuelito in 1851, but severe drought, famine, and raids from other nations led the Navajo to retaliate again against Fort Defiance in 1860.
* After continuous raids from both sides, General James Henry Carleton ordered Navajo chiefs to surrender and commissioned Kit Carson’s campaign against the Navajo.
* Carson’s campaign devasted Navajo villages and forced the Long Walk migration in which the Navajo were forced to move to Fort Sumner with no food or shelter to sustain them on their trip, and with U.S. soldiers chasing them.
* Reservation life for the Navajo today is poor quality and the Navajo communities face many problems that other Americans do not.

Immediate effects

* The arrival of Fort Defiance on a good portion of Navajo land led to a time of hardship for the Navajo and continuous conflicts between Navajo and U.S. soldiers
* Carson’s campaign came after a time of struggling for the Navajo during the occupation of Fort Defiance and devastated Navajo communities.
* Many Navajo died from the forced migration to Fort Sumner.
* Navajo homes were burned or destroyed, livestock was confiscated, and people were forced to abandon their previous communities, traditions and livelihood.

Lasting effects

* Carson is viewed by some as an old-western legend or hero (Canfield, J. Douglas. “Kit Carson, John C. Fremont, Manifest Destiny, and the Indians)
* The Navajo nation is still the largest Native American tribe today with a population of about 350,000 occupying parts of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico.
* Reservation life is overlooked by some, and highly-criticized by others. Many people argue that quality of life in a reservation is unacceptable. There are issues with the number of available jobs on reservations, leading to crippling rates of unemployment, and there are also major health problems, such as tuberculosis and heart disease, that cause a shorter-than-normal life expectancy for Navajo peoples.
* Many household heads are forced to leave their families behind and seek work outside the reservation just to survive.

Timeline

* 1851 Edwin Sumner’s campaign against the Navajo
* 1855 Treaty between Manuelito and U.S. Officials
* 1858 Navajo demand that Fort Defiance stop grazing livestock on Navajo land
* 1860 Second Battle of Fort Defiance
* 1861 Treaty at Fort Fauntleroy
* 1863 Beginning of the Kit Carson campaign
* 1864-1866 The Long Walk Migration

Quotes:

* “That these laws are adapted to their condition and in the main promotive of their happiness and prosperity, their material condition and the absence of discontent conclusively testify. It would be no boon to them to convert them into citizens, and leave them within the operations of the civil code of this Territory. On the contrary, such a policy would probably result in their destruction.”

Conclusion: The forced removal of the Navajo and other Native Americans by the U.S. military in the mid-18th century has caused a chain of events that has led to the abandonment of traditional Navajo culture and has devastated sense of community and quality of life or Navajo peoples.