

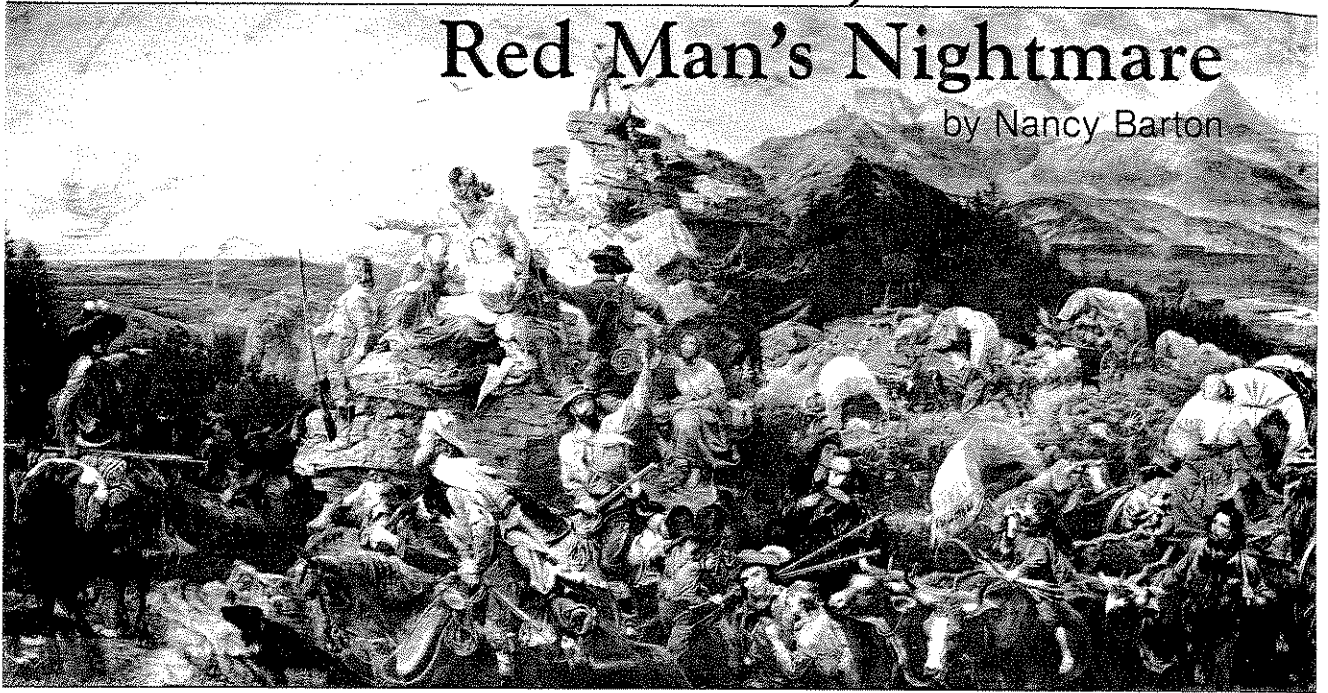
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# Manifest Destiny: White Man's Dream,

LEFT: 19th century American paintings often did not give the true picture of the move westward.

## Red Man's Nightmare

by Nancy Barton



"Go west, young man, go west." With that advice, newsman Horace Greeley expressed the sentiments of 19th century America.

America was a young nation and eager to prove to the world that its new constitutional government would work. The U.S. government and much of the country's white population believed it was America's manifest destiny (or inevitable mission) to settle all the land between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It would be a test of the country's ability to govern itself and to protect its entire territory from European takeover.

So the great westward migration became the American dream. But the white man's dream was the red man's nightmare. The manifest destiny vision

of America's future included no place for the Indians—America's original inhabitants—and their culture. It soon became apparent that, if the red man was to survive, he must either get out of the white man's way or become like him. As the white man struggled to settle the continent, the red man struggled to survive.

In the 1800s, America was intent upon "winning the West" from the foreign powers which held the land west of the Mississippi River. Spain occupied California and much of the Southwest, and Britain claimed the Oregon Territory. And both Spain and France had alternately laid claim to the Louisiana Territory until 1803 when it was purchased by America. The fact that Indians had always occupied these lands meant little. If the Indians resisted the progress of the white man, the nation would solve the problem by moving the Indians.

And that is exactly what it did. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized President Andrew Jackson to grant the eastern tribes perpetual title to certain lands west of the Mississippi River. By 1840, nearly the entire eastern Indian population of 100,000 had moved west—against its will.

But this did not end the matter. By 1840, the Western Territories were no longer as remote as they had once seemed. Rumors of gold, unlimited land grants, and promises of easy fortune had brought many easterners to the West. Technological advances speeded up the process. First, the

RIGHT: Chief Joseph (Hinmaton-Yalakit) wears the formal clothing of the Nez Perce tribe.

steamboat took settlers to California by traveling around South America. Later, the transcontinental railroad replaced the earlier wagon trains. And as eastern and foreign markets increased their demands for the western products of cattle, grain, and minerals, new settlers flooded into the West to help meet those demands.

Many treaties were made as the white man sought rights of free passage across the continent. But the Indians objected to the white man's progress because, as an old Wintu Indian explained, unlike the Indians, the white man "never cared for land or deer or bear." The white man shocked the Indian with his careless destruction of their food supply which the great Sioux Chief, Black Elk described:

I can remember when the bison were so many that they could not be counted, but more and more white men came to kill them. . . (They) did not kill them to eat; . . . they took only their hides to sell. Sometimes

they did not even take their hides, only their tongues.

Though the Indians fought to keep the white man from their homeland, the settlers became more firmly lodged in the West. Overcoming the hardships of disease, starvation, and Indian harassment, families established successful farms and ranches on the plains. Many of the fortune seekers who crossed the continent in search of gold and silver remained to build large cities in the West. Immigrants, with hopes of trading the repression and poverty of the Old World for the freedom and prosperity of the New World, swarmed to the frontier to labor on the railroads, in the mines, and at the slaughter houses.

By mid-century, armed forts were built to protect the white man's progress, and as the Shawnee chief Tecumseh foresaw, "No treaty will keep whites out of our lands." In fact,

between 1850 and 1880 most treaties were abandoned as the land was developed by white men. Despite the efforts of eastern abolitionists and religious leaders to safeguard the rights of the Indians, one tribe after another was herded onto reservations. To Indians, who did not believe in the ideas of "buying" or "owning" the land, the white man's actions were bewildering. As Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce explained:

I never said the land was mine to do with as I chose. . . . I claim a right to live on my land, and accord you the privilege to live on yours.

By the end of the 19th century, the continent had been settled. America could claim all the land between the





*After being moved to reservations, Indians often had to wait in line to receive rations of food and supplies from the government.*

Atlantic and Pacific and the Great Lakes and the Rio Grande. The true frontier was a thing of the past. America's government had proven itself. But not all people were permitted to enjoy all of the individual liberties promised by the Constitution. Among those who still lacked certain rights were women, blacks, and Indians.

Chief Joseph had been ignored when he admonished the white man to treat all people alike. He said:

Let me be a free man, — free to travel, to work, to trade where I choose, to choose my own teachers, to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and act for myself.

But liberty and self-government belonged only to the white man until

after the West was won. Then, burdened by the costs of running the reservations, the government cut off much of its financial support to the reservations, saying that the Indian should now become independent and self-sufficient like the white man.

Today, about 700,000 Indians — half of the country's Indian population — live on reservations. For the most part, they govern themselves. The government's relationship with the reservations is a complex one. Among other things, it involves providing aid in various forms and, in some cases, repaying the Indians for wrongs done them in the past.