

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Seventy-Five

Indians On The Warpath

LESSON IDEA

As the American West was being settled by white men, resistance by Indians and clashes between the two forces were inevitable. That prolonged conflict is the theme of today's lesson.

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1848 WAS THE YEAR Europe was set afire by revolution; and farmers, merchants, craftsmen, and workers were crushed like grapes in a winepress by revolutionaries conspiring to destroy civilization in the name of "liberty and equality." It was the year of Karl Marx, the *Communist Manifesto*, and the growth of the cancer of collectivism — in the Old World.

But in the New World, in America, it was a year of discovery and opportunity. Gold was found in California! And its glittering promise attracted thousands of people from every country in the world. Better to risk health and future in a long ocean voyage than to be terrorized by the revolutionaries of Europe. The war whoops of Plains Indians might even be less dangerous than the deadly lies of socialists in Paris. Never was there a sharper contrast between the Old World and the New than in 1848.

Which world would you have chosen if you had lived in 1848? The Old World of revolution? Or the New World of promise? Why? [*Encourage family discussion.*]

Those who knew the Plains Indians were certain that war would be inevitable soon after the first white settlers moved past the Missouri River. For

one thing, war was the principal amusement, sport, and status symbol of Plains Indians. To have any prestige, authority, or safety — even to marry — a Plains Indian had first to prove his worth as a warrior. Hunting was his business, a drudgery and a necessity; but war was his entertainment. As the old warriors put it: "Plains Indians will always be fighting; they are like two mean dogs. If you catch them fighting, you can drag them apart, but as soon as you turn them loose, they will go right back to fighting again."

During the long winter months, when there were no buffalo to hunt or councils to attend, recounting past victories was the favorite pastime of the warriors. Seated around the fire that warmed his tepee, the warrior would relive his moments of bravery, the "coup" he counted — meaning the times he had touched an enemy with weapon or hand — while the young braves of the tribe listened in admiration.

Moreover, as historian Stanley Vestal explains, "for the Plains Indian the change from peace to war was only the work of an instant. He had no problems of reconversion. The tools with which he earned his living were the weapons he used in his wars. Any Indian, when affronted, was likely to change from a killer of buffalo to a killer of men at a moment's notice."

There were as many as one hundred intertribal feuds. "Even so," says Vestal, "the balance of power on the Plains might have remained fairly steady but for the coming of the white man with his deadlier

