

Report of the Secretary of War, 1868.

In his report to the president, Secretary of War J. M. Schofield addressed the conflict between Indians and settlers on the Great Plains during and after the Civil War. In it he refers to a peace commission appointed to investigate the situation. The commission, which included the prominent Civil War commander William T. Sherman, concluded that requiring Indians to be confined on reservations was the only practical means of saving them while protecting white settlers. In the years that followed Sherman was in charge of carrying out this policy.

It is useless any longer to attempt the occupation of these plains in common with these tribes. The country is adapted only to grazing, which necessitates scattered settlements, while the horses and cattle tempt the hungry Indian, who, deprived of his accustomed subsistence, will steal rather than starve, and will kill in order to steal. With such opposing interests, the races *cannot* live together, and it is the Indian who must yield. They have been assigned reservations with, in 50 years, will enrich their descendants, and meantime they must be fed while learning to cultivate the soil and rear domestic animals.

But personal labor and restriction to one place being at variance with the hereditary pride and habits of the Indian, the desired result can only be obtained by coercion, and it was for this reason that the peace commission, in view, too, of recent events, was compelled to the conclusion, in their late report, that the management of Indian affairs should be again vested in the War Department, as the only branch of the government able to use the required force promptly and without the circumlocution unavoidable, no other department being able to act with such vigor and promptness as to warrant any hope that the plans and purposes of the commission could be carried into execution.

The plan of the peace commission is by General Sherman believed to be the only means of saving the Indians from total annihilation, and he urges upon Congress its immediate adoption. Meanwhile his purposes are declared to be: to protect the Missouri River traffic and the Union Pacific railroad with jealous care; to gather the wandering bands of Sioux to the reservation selected north of Nebraska and feed and protect them to the extent of his means and to destroy and to punish, to his utmost power, the hostile Indians, till they are willing to go and remain upon the reservation assigned to them at Fort Cobb where he is prepared to provide for them to a limited extent. This double policy, of peace within their reservations and war without, must soon, in his opinion, bring matters to a determination.