

# Westward Expansion

## Miners & Ranchers

### Growth of the Mining Industry

#### Comstock Lode

- Near Virginia City, NV
- Big deposit of silver
- Virginia City grew overnight
- When silver played out, people left the town
- Happened all over the west

#### Types of Mining

- **Placer**- surface mining
- **Hydraulic**- H<sub>2</sub>O pressure strips dirt away & leaves ore
- **Quartz**- digging underground
- Ranching & Cattle Drives

### The Growth of Beef

- Early 1800s, no one tried to raise cows on the Great Plains
- Environment was too harsh
- By mid-1800s, a new breed emerges
- Called Texas Longhorn
- Can survive on Plains
- After Civil War, Eastern demand for cattle increases
- Railroads also move into the Plains
- Causes beef prices to soar

#### The Long Drive

- Cattle were allowed to roam free on the open range
- Would be rounded up and driven north to the rail head
- Then shipped east
- Major route north called Chisholm Trail (ended in Abilene, KS)
- Cowboys drove cattle north
- Other “cowtowns”- Ellsworth, KS; Dodge City, KS

#### End of the Cattle Boom

- By 1880s, cattle was big business
- Cattle ranchers competed with sheep herders for range land
- Range wars broke out
- Range fenced off
- Use barb wire- cheap & easy
- Soon too much cattle caused the price to drop
- Blizzard in 1886-7 killed many cattle
- Cattle industry shifted to fenced ranches

- End of the Open Range system

## The Railroads

### Pacific Railway Act

- Passed in 1862- wanted to connect East & West Coast with a railroad
- Two companies- Union Pacific (west from Nebraska) and Central Pacific (east from California)
- Met in Ogden, Utah

### Land Grant System

- Building railroads is expensive
- US gave railroads land, RR sell land to make \$
- Spur Growth

### Railroad Consolidation

- In 1865, hundreds of small unconnected existed
- Eastern investor wanted them linked
- This would ease transportation and increase markets
- One of the most famous consolidators was Cornelius Vanderbilt
- Merged railroads from NYC to Chicago.
- Benefits of Consolidation
  - 1883- American Railway Association divide US in to 4 time zones to keep standard time
  - Easy to shift cars from one track to another
  - Made Americans more alike, less isolated

### Corruption

- Many said that railroad entrepreneurs got rich by swindling, cheating, and bribery
- Ex- Jay Gould- practiced insider trading to make \$

### Credit Mobilier Scandal

- 1872
- Credit Mobilier was a construction company
- Owned by stock holders in Union Pacific RR
- Un. Pac. signed building contracts w/ Cr. Mob. (basically, they paid themselves to work)
- Cr. Mob. overcharged Un. Pac.
- Un. Pac. was bankrupt, though the stock holders made millions

- To help Un. Pac, they bribed members of Congress with cheap stock in Un. Pac.

## Farming on the Plains

### Settlement Begins

- In the early/mid 1800s, the Great Plains were called the “Great American Desert”
- No one would settle there
- Late 1800, that changes
- Railroads begin selling land in the Plains
- In 1870s, above average rainfall makes the Plains lush
- Homestead Act (1862) also makes settling attractive (keep gov. land if you live on it 5 years)
- New settlers had no materials to build with
- Cut blocks of sod to build homes
- The Wheat Belt
- **Commercial Farms**
- Large farms with financial resources could make quick profit
- New technology (seed drill, thresher, reaper) made farming easier
- Main crop grown was wheat
- large, profitable wheat farms were called bonanza farms- they gave big profits
- **Hard Times**
- 1880s- US is world’s leading producer of wheat
- By 1890s, competition from other countries brings price of wheat down
- Many farmers have to mortgage their land to make ends meet
- Often, the banks foreclosed & the farmer lost his land

### Closing the Frontier

- Oklahoma
- April 1889- US Gov. opens the last large territory to settlement- OK
- 1890- Census says there is no frontier

## Native Americans

- **Plains Indians**
- Most Plains Nat. Am. were nomads
- Followed food- mainly buffalo
- As whites moved west, they came in conflict with the Nat. Am.

### Dakota Sioux

- Dakota lived on reservation in MN

- US Gov. paid them annuities, but little \$ got to Dakota
- Dakota are starving, ask for loans
- When they don’t get them, they take up arms

### Lakota Sioux

- After Dakota uprising, US army starts patrolling Sioux land
- Lakota work hard to keep hunting lands
- They resist the army’s presence

### Fetterman’s Massacre

- Lakota under command of Red Cloud lure army patrol into a trap
- Army unit led by Capt. Wm. Fetterman
- Fetterman’s unit is slaughtered

### Sand Creek

- Eastern CO
- Nat. Am begin to attack miners going to Denver
- CO. Governor orders Native American to surrender
- Several hundred Cheyenne go to negotiate a peace deal (not surrender)
- They camp at Sand Creek
- CO Militia attack camped Cheyenne
- Many Cheyenne, including women & children killed

### Indian Peace Commission

- Created 2 large reservations- one for the Sioux, one for the Southern Plains
- Anyone who didn’t go would be forced to by the Army
- Plan doomed to failure
- If they went to the reservation, they faced poverty, hunger & corruption
- Many refused and continued to hunt buffalo
- By 1870s, many Nat Am leave reservation
- However, by 1889, very little buffalo remained

## Last Native American Wars

### Little Bighorn

- 1876- Gold found on Sioux reservation
- White miners illegally move onto the reservation and begin mining
- Sioux leave reservation
- George Armstrong Custer sent to bring them back

- Custer's units attack a larger Sioux force (led by Crazy Horse & Sitting Bull).
- Custer (and much of his unit) is killed
- Army increases pressure to put Sioux back on reservation

### Nez Perce

- Nez Perce are Nat Am in Idaho
- Forced to move to a reservation
- Decide to flee to Canada
- Stopped just short of the border and forced to Oklahoma

### Wounded Knee

- 1890- Ghost Dance ritual becomes popular among many Sioux
- Ghost Dancers believed whites would disappear, buffalo return, and dead would return
- US blamed the practice on Sitting Bull
- US tries to arrest Sitting Bull
- Sitting Bull killed in the attempted arrest
- Ghost Dancers flee
- Camp at Wounded Knee Creek
- US Army attacks camp, kills about 200 men, women & children

### Assimilation

#### Dawes Act

- Many believe Nat Am needed to assimilate- absorb into American society
- Dawes Act broke reservation into individual allotments for Nat Ams
- Plan failed
- Many Nat Am didn't want to be farmers or couldn't be successful
- Many sold land
- Ultimately, dependence on buffalo doomed the Native Americans
- 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner claimed that the frontier had played a central role in forming the American character
- the frontier produced highly individualistic, restless, and socially mobile Americans

### Western Myth

- frontier life created Americans who were ready for adventure, bent on self-improvement, and committed to democracy
- Turner defined settlers as whites and made no distinction between the experiences of women and men
- the romanticized image of the American cowboy began with dime novels in the 1870s

- writers transformed real figures from the west into larger than life characters
- 1883, Wm. F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody began touring with his Wild West show
- books and Wild West shows helped create a stereotype of the west
- some of the very first motion pictures were westerns which were based on these stereotypes
- early movies had no sound and relied on these stereotypes to develop characters and plot lines