

Chapter 17 Outline - The Development of the West, 1865–1900

- I. Introduction

Between 1870 and 1890, the population of the trans-Mississippi West expanded to nearly 17 million people. Nevertheless, much of the United States remained unsettled, providing Americans with the faith that they could always move on to another opportunity.

- II. The Economic Activities of Native Peoples

- A. Subsistence Cultures

Western Indians had distinct cultures, but they all lived in subsistence economies. On the Plains, buffalo provided the basis for survival, while the southwestern tribes depended on livestock and those of the Northwest on salmon.

- B. Slaughter of Buffalo

White hunters slaughtered millions of buffalo, thus contributing to a complex combination of circumstances that doomed the bison and destroyed the economic and social foundations of the Plains tribes.

- C. Decline of Salmon

Commercial fishing in the Northwest was one of several factors that led to the decline of the salmon population.

- III. The Transformation of Native Cultures

- A. Western Men

Most of those who migrated to the West in the late nineteenth century were young males who held attitudes of racial contempt toward Indians and had few qualms about using their weapons against animals or humans who got in their way.

Indian warriors were also young, armed, and prone to violence.

- B. Government Policy and Treaties

In order to formulate an “Indian policy” the U.S. government put more emphasis on tribal organization than was warranted. In addition to tribes, Native Americans organized into “bands” and “confederacies” that were just as important to them. Tribal chiefs often did not speak for all members of a group making negotiations and treaties confusing for all.

- C. Reservation Policy

From the 1860s to the 1880s, the federal government pursued a policy of placing Indians on reservations. The reservation policy had degrading consequences.

- D. Native Resistance

Tribes reacted against white encroachment in a variety of ways.

- E. Reform of Indian Policy

Several groups worked to acculturate Indians, but these organizations often tried to force Native Americans to accept middle-class values.

- F. Zitkala-Sa

Some Indians, such as Zitkala-Sa, were able to use their white-controlled education to their advantage. She wrote on the needs of her people and on the preservation of their cultures.

- G. Dawes Severalty Act

In 1887, Congress began making individual, rather than tribal, grants of land.

In attempting to assimilate Indians into white American forms of

culture, the government's Indian policy stressed private ownership of property and education programs in boarding schools away from the reservation.

- H. Ghost Dance

Many Indians turned to spiritualism to preserve the last remnants of their culture. Fear by U.S. government agents that the Ghost Dance religion would lead to an Indian uprising was a factor in the Massacre at Wounded Knee.

- I. The Losing of the West

The Dawes-Severalty Act, along with political and ecological crises, led to the decline of the western tribes.

- IV. The Extraction of Natural Resources

- A. Mining and Lumbering

Unlike Indians living in subsistence economies, white Americans brought extractive economies to the West. Individuals who discovered veins of metal usually sold them to large mining syndicates.

Lumbering needed vast tracts of forest land to be profitable. Lumber corporations used the Timber and Stone Act, which was intended for private citizens, to grab millions of acres of forest land.

- B. Complex Communities

The West was a multiracial and multicultural society.

Many African Americans were "exodusters" who built all-black western towns.

- C. Western Women

Some frontier communities had a substantial white female population,

but their independence was limited.

- D. Significance of Race

White settlers made race a distinguishing social characteristic in the West.

- E. Conservation Movement

Many Americans believed that federal land should be open to private development. However, those who wanted to protect the natural environment began to organize a conservation movement, which led to the designation of the first national park in 1872 and to the creation of forest reserves in 1891.

- F. Admission of New States

Several new western states entered the Union in 1889.

The West gave rise to legends that became part of American folk culture.

- G. Western Folk Heroes

Mining towns of the west attracted colorful characters. Lawmen, thieves, and those who played both sides of the fence became material for writers Mark Twain, Bret Harte and others.

- V. Irrigation and Transportation

- A. Rights to Water

The English heritage of riparian rights placed restrictions on individual access to water resources. Many westerners advocated prior appropriation, which gave the original claimant control over water.

California experienced the most dramatic water-related problems. Largely arid, yet potentially productive, the state led the way in

irrigation and reclamation policies.

- B. Government Supervision of Water Rights

State governments established commissions to regulate water rights. A precious commodity in the west, states such as California became heavily irrigated agricultural centers through strict legislation regulating water usage.

- C. Newlands Reclamation Act

The reclamation law of 1902 allowed the federal government to control the use of western water.

- D. Railroad Construction

As the result of a railroad construction boom after the Civil War, the United States contained one-third of the railroad track in the world by 1900. Railroad expansion spawned related industries and accelerated the growth of western regional centers.

- E. Railroad Subsidies

To encourage construction, all levels of government provided bountiful subsidies to the railroad companies.

- F. Standard Gauge; Standard Time

Railroad construction brought technological and organizational reforms. Railroads also altered American concepts of space and time and led to a nationwide standardization of time through the establishment of time zones.

- VI. Farming the Plains

- A. Settlement of the Plains

Hundreds of thousands of emigrants moved into the Great Plains

during the 1870s and 1880s.

- B. Hardship on the Plains

Settlers on the Plains lived in an extremely harsh climate where the terrain was inhospitable and swarms of insects could ravage entire crops.

- C. Social Isolation

Pioneers also faced severe social isolation, living lives of loneliness and monotony.

- D. Mail-Order Companies and Rural Free Delivery

Plains dwellers benefited from the advent of mail-order catalogues and the extension of federal postal service.

- E. Mechanization of Agriculture

After the Civil War, continued demand and high prices for farm commodities encouraged the use of machinery.

- F. Legislative and Scientific Aids to Farmers

Congress passed several acts designed to enhance agricultural development. Scientific innovation also helped improve farm output.

- VII. The Ranching Frontier

- A. The Open Range

Many operators ran huge herds on unfenced public lands. These giant operations captured the imaginations of easterners, but ultimately cattle began to overrun the range.

Use of the public land by both shepherders and ranchers led to

conflict between the two groups.

- B. Barbed Wire

The invention of barbed wire in 1873 gave ranchers and farmers an economical means by which to enclose their herds and fields.

- C. Ranching as Big Business

By 1890, big businesses were taking over the cattle industry.