

A.P. U.S. HISTORY NOTES

Chapter 27: “The Great West and the Agricultural Revolution”

~ 1865 – 1890 ~

- I. Indians Embattled in the West
 1. After the Civil War, the Great West was still relatively untamed, wild, full of Indians, bison, and wildlife, and sparsely populated by a few **Mormons** and Mexicans.
 2. As the White settlers began to populate the Great West, the Indians, caught in the middle, were increasingly turned against each other, infected with White man’s diseases, and stuck battling to hunt the few remaining bison that were still around.
 - i. The **Sioux**, displaced by **Chippewas** from their ancestral lands at the headwaters of the Mississippi in the late 1700s, expanded at the expense of the **Crows**, **Kiowas**, and **Pawnees**, and justified their actions through the excuse that White men had done the same thing to them.
 - a. The Indians had become great riders and fighters ever since the Spanish introduced the horse to them.
 3. The federal government tried to pacify the Indians by signing treaties at **Fort Laramie** in 1851 and **Fort Atkinson** in 1853 with the chiefs of the tribes, but the U.S. failed to understand that such “tribes” and “chiefs” didn’t exist in Indian culture, and that in most cases, Native Americans didn’t recognize authorities outside of their families.
 4. In the 1860s, the U.S. government intensified its effort into herding Indians into still smaller and smaller reservations (like the **Dakota Territory**).
 - i. Indians were often promised that they wouldn’t be bothered further after moving out of their ancestral lands, and often, Indian agents were corrupt and pawned off shoddy food and products to their own fellow Indians.
 - ii. White men often disregarded treaties, though, and they often “ripped off” Indians.
 5. In frustration, many Native American tribes attack Whites, and slew of skirmishes from 1868 to 1890 called the “**Indian Wars**” made up the bitterness of the Indians.
 - i. Many times, though, the Indians were better equipped than the federal troops sent to quell their revolts.
 - ii. Generals **Sherman**, **Sheridan**, and **Custer** all battled Indians.
- II. Receding Native Population
 1. Violence reigned supreme in Indian-White Man relations.
 - i. In 1864, at **Sand Creek**, Colorado, Colonel **J.M. Chivington**’s militia massacred some four hundred Indians in cold blood—Indians who had thought they had been promised immunity and Indians who were peaceful and harmless.
 - ii. In 1866, a Sioux war party ambushed Captain **William J. Fetterman**’s command of 81 soldiers and civilians who were constructing the Bozeman Trail to the Montana goldfields, leaving no survivors.
 - a. This massacre was one of the few Indian victories, as another treaty at Fort Laramie was signed two years later.
 2. Colonel Custer found gold in the **Black Hills** of South Dakota, and hordes of gold-seekers invaded the Sioux reservation in search for gold, causing the Sioux to go on the warpath, completely decimating Custer’s Seventh Cavalry at **Little Big Horn** in the process.

- i. The reinforcements that arrived later brutally hunted down the Indians who had attacked, including their leader, **Sitting Bull** (he escaped).
 - 3. The **Nez Percé** Indians also revolted when gold seekers made the government shrink their reservation by 90%, and after a long tortuous battle, **Chief Joseph** finally surrendered his band after a long trek across the **Continental Divide** toward **Canada**.
 - 4. The most difficult to subdue were the **Apache** tribes of Arizona and New Mexico, led by **Geronimo**, but even they finally surrendered after being pushed to Mexico, and afterwards, they became successful farmers.
 - 5. The Indians were so easily tamed due to the railroad, which shot through the heart of the West, the White man's diseases, and the extermination of the buffalo.
- III. **Bellowing Herds of Bison**
 - 1. In the early days, tens of millions of Bison dotted the American prairie, and by the end of the Civil War, there were still 15 million buffalo grazing, but it was the eruption of the railroad that really started the buffalo massacre.
 - i. Many people killed buffalo for their meat, their skins, or their tongues, but many people either killed the bison for sport or killed them, took one small part of their bodies (like the tongue) and just left the rest of the carcass to rot (what a waste!).
 - 2. By 1885, fewer than 1000 buffalo were left, and the species was in danger of extinction, mostly in **Yellowstone National Park**.
- IV. **The End of the Trail**
 - 1. Sympathy for the Indians finally materialized in the 1880s, helped in part by **Helen Hunt Jackson's** novels, *A Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona*.
 - i. Humanitarians wanted to kindly help Indians "walk the White man's road" while the hard-liners stuck to their "kill 'em all" beliefs, and no one cared much for the traditional Indian heritage and culture.
 - 2. Often, zealous White missionaries would force Indians to convert, and in 1884, they helped urge the government to outlaw the sacred **Sun Dance**.
 - i. At the **Battle of Wounded Knee**, the "**Ghost Dance**," as it was called by the Whites, as brutally stamped out by U.S. troops, who killed women and kids too.
 - 3. The **Dawes Severalty Act** of 1887 dissolved the legal entities of all tribes, but if the Indians behaved the way Whites wanted them to behave, they could receive full U.S. citizenship in 25 years (full citizenship to all Indians was granted in 1924).
 - i. Reservation land not allotted to Indians under the act was sold to railroads,
 - ii. In 1879, the **Carlisle Indian School** in Pennsylvania was founded to teach Native American children how to behave like White man, completely erasing their culture.
 - iii. The Dawes Act struck forcefully at the Indians, and by 1900 they had lost half the land than they had held 20 years before, but under this plan, which would outline U.S. policy toward Indians until the 1934 **Indian Reorganization Act**, helped the Indian population rebound and grow.
- V. **Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker**
 - 1. Gold was discovered in California in the late 1840s, and in 1858, the same happened at Pike's Peak in Colorado, but within a month or two, it was all out.
 - 2. The Comstock Lode in Nevada was discovered in 1859, and a fantastic amount of gold and silver worth more than \$340 million was mined.
 - 3. Smaller "lucky strikes" also drew money-lovers to Montana, Idaho, and other western states, and anarchy seemed to rule, but in the end, what was left were usually ghost towns.
 - 4. After the surface gold was found, ore-breaking machinery was brought in to break the gold-bearing quartz (very expensive to do).

5. Women found new rights in the new lands, gaining suffrage in Wyoming (1869), Utah (1870), Colorado (1893) and Idaho (1896).
 6. Mining also added to the folklore and American literature (**Bret Harte & Mark Twain**).
- VI. Beef Bonanzas and the Long Drive
1. The problem of marketing meat profitably to the public market was solved by the new transcontinental railroads, where cattle could now be shipped bodily to the stockyards, and under “beef barons” like the **Swifts and Armours**.
 - i. The meat-packaging industry thus sprang up.
 2. The “**Long Drive**” now emerged to become a spectacular feeder of the slaughterhouses, as Texas cowboys herded cattle across desolate land to railroad terminals.
 - i. **Dodge City, Abilene, Ogallala, and Cheyenne** became favorite stopovers.
 - a. At Abilene, Marshal **James B. Hickok** maintained order.
 3. The railroads made the cattle herding business prosper, but it also destroyed it, for the railroads also brought sheepherders and homesteaders who built barbed-wire fences that were too numerous to be cut through by the cowboys.
 - i. Also, blizzards in the winter of 1886-87 left dazed cattle starving and freezing.
 4. Breeders learned to fence their ranches and organize (i.e. the **Wyoming Stock-Growers’ Association**).
 - i. The legends of the cowboys were made here at this time but were soon forgotten.
- VII. Free Land for Free Families
1. The **Homestead Act** of 1862 allowed folks to get as much as 160 acres of land in return for living on it for five years, improving it, and paying a nominal fee of about \$30.00, or allowed folks to get land after only six month’s residence for \$1.25 an acre.
 - i. Before, the U.S. government had sold land for revenue, but now, it was giving it away!!!
 - ii. This act led half a million families to buy land and settle out West, but it often turned out to be a cruel hoax because in the dry Great Plains, 160 acres was rarely enough for a family to earn a living and survive, and often, families were forced to give up their homesteads before the five years were up, since droughts, bad land, and lack of necessities forced them out.
 - iii. However, fraud was spawned by the Homestead Act, since almost ten times as much land ended up in the hands of land-grabbing promoters than in real farmers, and often these cheats would not even live on the land, but say that they erected a “twelve by fourteen” dwelling—which later turned out to be twelve by fourteen *inches*!!!
- VIII. Taming Western Deserts
1. Railroads such as the **Northern Pacific** helped develop the agricultural West, a place where, after the tough, horse-trodden lands had been watered and dug up, proved to be surprisingly fertile.
 2. Due to higher wheat prices resulting from crop failures around the world, more people rashly pushed further west, past the 100th meridian, to grow wheat.
 - i. Here, as warned by geologist **John Wesley Powell**, so little rain fell that successful farming could only be attained by *massive* irrigation.
 - ii. To counteract the lack of water (and a six year drought in the 1880s), farmers developed the technique of “**dry farming**,” or using shallow cultivation methods to plant and farm, but over time, this method created a finely pulverized surface soil that contributed to the notorious “Dust Bowl” several decades later.
 3. A Russian species of wheat—tough and resistant to drought—was brought in and grew all over the Great Plains, while other plants were chosen in favor of corn.

4. Huge federally financed irrigation projects soon caused the **Great American Desert** to bloom, and dams that tamed the **Missouri** and **Columbia** Rivers helped water the land.
- IX. The Far West Comes of Age
1. The Great West experienced a population surge, as many people moved onto the frontier.
 2. New states like **Colorado**, **North Dakota**, **South Dakota**, **Montana**, **Washington**, **Idaho**, and **Wyoming** were admitted into the Union.
 - i. Not until 1896 was **Utah** allowed into the Union, and by the 20th century, only **Oklahoma**, **New Mexico**, and **Arizona** remained as territories.
 3. In Oklahoma, the U.S. government made available land that had formerly belonged to the Native Americans, and thousands of “sooners” jumped the boundary line and illegally went into Oklahoma, often forcing U.S. troops to evict them.
 - i. On April 22, 1889, Oklahoma was legally opened, and 18 years later, in 1907, Oklahoma became the “Sooner State.”
 4. In 1890, for the first time, the U.S. census announced that a frontier was no longer discernible.
 5. The “closing” of the frontier inspired the **Turner Thesis**, which stated that America needed a frontier.
 6. At first, the public didn’t seem to notice that there was no longer a frontier, but later, they began to realize that the land was not infinite, and concern led to the first national park being opened: **Yellowstone**, founded in 1872, followed by **Yosemite** and **Sequoia** (1890).
- X. The Folding Frontier
1. The frontier was a state of mind and a symbol of opportunity.
 2. The “**safety valve theory**” stated that the frontier was like a safety valve for folks who, when it became too crowded in their area, could simply pack up and leave, moving West.
 - i. Actually, few city-dwellers left the cities for the West, since they didn’t know how to farm; the West increasingly became less and less a land of opportunity for farms, but still was good for hard laborers and ranchers.
 - ii. Still, free acreage did lure a host of immigrant farmers to the West—farmers that probably wouldn’t have come to the West had the land not been cheap—and the lure of the West may have led to city employers raising wages to keep workers in the cities!
 3. It seems that the cities, not the West, were the safety valves, as busted farmers and fortune seekers made **Chicago** and **San Francisco** into large cities.
 4. Of hundreds of years, Americans had expanded west, and it was in the trans-Mississippi west that the Indians made their last stand, where Anglo culture collided with Hispanic culture, and where America faced Asia.
 5. The life that we live today is one that those pioneers dreamed of, and the life that they lived is one that we can only dream.
- XI. The Farm Becomes a Factory
1. Farmers were now increasingly producing single “cash” crops, since they could then concentrate their efforts, make profits, and buy manufactured goods from mail order, such as the **Aaron Montgomery Ward** catalogue (first sent in 1872).
 2. Large-scale farmers tried banking, railroading, and manufacturing, but new inventions in farming, such as a steam engine that could pull behind it the plow, seeder, and harrow, the new twine binder, and the combined reaper-thresher sped up harvesting and lowered the number of people needed to farm.
 - i. Farmers, though, were inclined to blame banks and railroads for their losses rather than their own shortcomings.

3. The mechanization of agriculture led to enormous farms, such as those in the Minnesota-North Dakota area and the Central Valley of California.
 - i. **Henry George** described the state as a country of plantations and estates.
 - ii. California vegetables and fruits, raised by ill-paid Mexican workers, made handsome profits when sold to the East.
- XII. Deflation Dooms the Debtor
1. In the 1880s, when world markets rebounded, produced more crops, and forced prices down, the farmers in America were the ones that found ruin.
 2. Paying back debts was especially hard in this deflation-filled time during which there was simply not enough money to go around for everyone.
 3. Farmers operated year after year on losses and lived off their fat as best they could, but thousands of homesteads fell to mortgages and foreclosures during this time, and farm tenancy rather than farm ownership was increasing.
 4. The fall of the farmers in the late 1800s was similar to the fall of the South and its “King Cotton” during the Civil War: depending solely on one crop was good in good times but disastrous during less prosperous times.
- XIII. Unhappy Farmers
1. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, droughts, grasshopper plagues, and searing heat waves made the toiling farmers miserable and poor.
 2. City, state, and federal governments added to this by gouging the farmers, ripping them off by making them pay painful taxes when they could least afford to do so.
 3. The railroads (by fixing freight prices), the middlemen (by taking huge cuts in profits), and the various harvester, barbed wire, and fertilizer trusts all harassed farmers.
 4. In 1890, one half of the U.S. population still consisted of farmers, but they were hopelessly disorganized.
- XIV. The Farmers Take Their Stand
1. In the **Greenback movement** after the Civil War, agrarian unrest had flared forth as well.
 2. In 1867, the **National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry**, better known as **The Grange**, was founded by **Oliver H. Kelley** to improve the lives of isolated farmers through social, educational, and fraternal activities.
 - i. Eventually, it spread to claim over 800,000 members in 1875, and the Grange changed its goals to include the improvement of the collective plight of the farmer.
 - ii. The Grangers found most success in the upper Mississippi Valley, and eventually, they managed to get Congress to pass a set of regulations known as the **Granger Laws**, but afterwards, their influence faded.
 3. The **Greenback Labor Party** also attracted farmers, and in 1878, the Greenback Laborites polled over a million votes and elected 14 members of Congress.
 - i. In 1880, the Greenbackers ran General **James B. Weaver**, a Civil War general, but he only polled 3% of the popular vote.
- XV. Prelude to Populism
1. The **Farmers’ Alliance**, founded in the late 1870s, was another coalition of farmers seeking to overthrow the chains from the banks and railroads that bound them.
 - i. However, its programs only aimed at those who owned their own land, thereby ignoring the tenant farmers, and it purposefully excluded Blacks.
 - ii. The White Alliance members agreed on the nationalization of railroads, the abolition of national banks, a graduated income tax, and a new federal subtreasury for farmers.
 2. Populists were led by **Ignatius Donnelly** from Minnesota and **Mary Elizabeth Lease**, both of whom spoke eloquently and attacked those that hurt farmers (banks, RR’s, etc...).

3. The Alliance was still not to be brushed aside, and in the coming decade, they would combine into a new People's Party (the Populist Party) to launch a new attack on the northeastern citadels of power.