

Chapter 16, The Conquest of the Far West

Pioneers such as farmers, ranchers, and miners settled west around 1845 and recreated the image of “The Great American Desert” to a legendary “Frontier.” Many Americans were in the west before the Civil War. Despite efforts to disperse established native populations, the Anglo-Americans found themselves among them with their influence in everything they did. Pioneers, the “rugged individualists” really relied on federal money and the capitalism of the East.

The Societies of the Far West

The [Far] West (“Great West”) was more than just one region beyond the Mississippi River; it was filled with many peoples and different environments

- I. The Western Tribes
 - A. Some were displaced Cherokees and Creeks
 - B. Decimation of Serrano, Chumash, Pomo, Maidu, Yurok, and Chinook
 1. 300,000 Indians had been decreased to 150,000 when Spanish diseases came to the Pacific coast
 2. Lived within the Hispanic society
 - C. Pueblos
 1. Farmers who had established irrigation systems, towns, and commerce
 2. Formed an alliance with Apaches, Navajos, and Comanches
 - D. Elaborate Caste System, exemplary of the Spanish Empire’s preoccupation with racial ancestry
 1. Spanish and Mexicans
 2. Pueblos
 3. Apaches, Navajos, *genizaros* or “Indians w/o tribes”
 - E. Plains Indians
 1. Diverse group of Indians (alliances v. conflict / sedentary v. nomadic hunters)
 2. Tribes were subdivided into bands, interrelated groups
 3. Bands had their own governing councils and decision making processes
 4. Practiced a nature religion
 5. Typical male/female roles within each band
 6. Hunted buffaloes on small horses, moved from place to place constructing tepees, did not disturb land
 - F. Economic Importance of the Buffalo
 1. Followed grazing buffalo, relied completely on them
 2. Principle food was buffalo flesh, clothes were skin
 - G. Warfare
 1. A warring group, trained in small skirmishes
 2. Established reputations of being aggressive and fierce among themselves
 3. Sioux were the most powerful military force in the Plains
 - H. Indian Weaknesses
 1. Did not unite against white aggression (Some alliances did form, however, like the Cheyenne-Sioux-Arapaho)
 2. Vulnerable to white diseases like smallpox
 3. Also, they were outmanned and outgunned by a more economically secure, industrially advanced people
- II. Hispanic New Mexico
 - A. American acquired Mexican lands with many Mexican people
 - B. Spanish-speakers in CA, NM, TX and AZ were transformed by capitalism
 - C. A diverse group of people, original and migrant, lived in NM communities since the 1600s
 - D. Taos Indian Rebellion
 1. General Stephen Kearney tried to establish a territorial government excluding the Mexican ruling class
 2. Hispanic-Indian fears caused the Taos Indians to rebel but the US organized a territorial government anyway
 - E. “Territorial Rings”
 1. Confiscated 2 million acres of land
 2. Put the old Hispanic elite out of power
 - F. Hispanic growth—Because the US Army had broken the Navajo-Apache power, Hispanics (long harassed by the alliance) were able to grow
 - G. Hispanic Resistance—Hispanics, mostly Mexican peasants, were so far from the Americans that many kept to themselves
 - H. Railroad increased expansion dramatically, along with Anglo-Americans, 100,000 Mexicans moved to West
- III. Hispanic California and Texas
 - A. Many Spanish missionaries took Indians to California, baptized them, and forced them to work like slaves
 - B. Decline of Mission Society
 1. The Mexican government forced power from the missionaries to a secular aristocracy
 2. Anglo-American influence was disastrous to the *californios* who were excluded from everything and lost their lands
 - C. Southern resistance
 1. In southern California, there were fewer whites and the *rancheros* who raised cattle found a market in the north
 2. Many ruinous factors in the 1860s caused a defeat of Hispanic society and aristocracy by 1880
 - D. Declining Status of Hispanics
 1. Texan Hispanics lost their land and power to the Anglo-Americans as well
 2. In Brownsville, Juan Cortina, a rancher, freed all Hispanics in a jail
 3. Despite his efforts to harass whites, the Mexican government imprisoned him
 4. Mexicans eventually became the working/lower class
 - E. Overall society
 1. Worse for the Indians than for the Hispanics
 2. Hispanics found work and new opportunities among Anglo-Americans

3. Overall, however, the Hispanics became an “impoverished working class”
- IV. The Chinese Migration
- A. Like Europeans, many Chinese moved to the New World for new opportunities from Australia to Hawaii to US
 - B. Racism
 1. About 200,000 Chinese were accepted for a while as “one of the most worthy classes of our newly adopted citizens”
 2. When they worked too hard, whites saw them as a threat and they had to deal with racism and discrimination
 - C. Although Chinese were successful gold-miners, the government made a “foreign miners tax”
 - D. New, better mines, financed by the East pushed Chinese out of mining
 - E. Building the Transcontinental Railroad
 1. Chinese worked hard with little wages and few demands, making 90% of the western railroad workforce
 2. Little protection from weather and conditions
 3. A failed rebellion by 5,000 Chinese ended in them being starved into submission
 4. After the railroad was done, they were out of work and found many different occupations
 - F. Establishment of “Chinatowns”
 1. Many Chinese lived in urban towns/San Francisco
 2. In Chinatowns in cities throughout California, Chinese merchants made a community that served as a small city, almost functioning as a family
 3. Some Chinese organizations, “tongs,” organizing opium trade, prostitution, and street fights
 4. Many Chinese worked in laundries because it was easy to establish
 - G. Only a few women compared to men, about half became prostitutes
 - H. Government worked to stamp out prostitution and balance the sexes
- V. Anti-Chinese Sentiments
- A. Anti-Coolie Clubs—Clubs organized to violently harass Chinese for accepting low wages, undercutting whites in unions
 - B. Democrats, members of the Workingmen’s Party of California, and capitalists attack the Chinese
 - C. Chinese Exclusion Act—no Chinese immigration for 10 years, no naturalization of Chinese, renewed and permanent
 - D. Chinese Resistance
 1. Six Companies (Chinese merchants or Chinatowns) petitioned the government with little avail
 2. Annoyed that Italians, Irish, and Jews were allowed to come to America but Chinese were not
- VI. Migration from the East
- A. There was already a substantial Anglo- and African-American population in West
 - B. California, Texas, and Oregon were already states
 - C. Along with Anglo-Americans, new European immigrants flocked to the West in millions
 - D. After the Transcontinental Railroad was completely, even more immigrants came
 - E. Homestead Act
 1. People could buy 160 acres of land as long as they improved it over 5 years
 2. A progressive measure to form new outposts for commercial agriculture
 3. 400,000 homesteaders gained title while many abandoned it because 160 acres could not sustain a grazing farm
 - F. Government Assistance
 1. Timber Culture Act—160 more acres if 40 acres of trees were planted
 2. Dessert Land Act—640 acres if you irrigate it in 3 years
 3. Timber and Stone Act—\$2.50 an acre in nonarable land
 4. Although this helped, fraud caused millions of acres to be taken unlawfully
 - G. After Kansas was made a state, many states petitioned for admission to the Union
 - H. At 1900 only Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma were still territories because of late settlement and low populations

The Changing Western Economy

A major effect of Anglo-American settlement in the west was eastern corporation involvement in the economy. Eastern corporations tied themselves to the west and the rest of the world, offering a venue for the great industry that was to erupt.

- I. Labor in the West
 - A. Although pay in the west was high because it was difficult to find workers when away from large towns and unwilling to hire Indians, the working conditions, lack of job security, and eventually competition from Chinese quickly made the pay worth it.
 - B. Many unemployed mobile men in the west (10% of population single), unmarried women worked as prostitutes, etc.
 - C. Limited social mobility—those without money often stayed poor, the rich got richer, mimicking the East
 - D. Racially stratified working class—although the upper tiers of society were mostly white, unskilled workers worked alongside Europeans, African Americans, Chinese, Filipinos, Mexicans, and Indians
 - E. Stereotypes
 1. White employers and workers alike believed that Chinese, Mexicans, and Filipinos were small enough to work in mines, accustomed to the heat for fields, and unambitious enough to work for low wages without the hope of mobility
 2. These stereotypes were perpetuated by white workers because it gave them hope for social mobility
- II. The Arrival of Miners
 - A. The mining boom served as the first western economy from 1860-1890 when migrants hope to make quick money
 - B. Life Cycle of a Mining Boom—a stampede starts with the news of gold or silver, followed by mining the surface gold or silver, digging deeper for quartz etc., and then limited mining with permanent local farming establishments
 - C. Pike’s Peak, Colorado—50,000 prospectors create boom towns in 1858 for a short time to mine gold; afterwards the Guggenheim interests (a corporation) established itself and found silver near Leadville
 - D. Comstock Lode—Henry Comstock found gold and silver in the Washoe district of Nevada, in the middle of the desert; yielding from 1860-1880 \$306 million

- E. Black Hills of Dakota—1874 gold was discovered, after the placer (surface) deposits ran out, the Homestake (a company) took over mining and the Dakotas became an agricultural economy
 - F. The great Anaconda copper mine (William Clark, 1881) and successive mining in tin, lead, quartz, and zinc became an industry instead of the short-lived gold and silver rushes
 - G. Boomtown life—an optimistic spirit prevailed and although most did not become rich, “bonanza kings” who did usually came from impoverished backgrounds
 - H. Gender imbalance—usually boom towns were “bad men” and outlaws who used their own laws in “vigilante” communities; women in the west usually came with their husbands working as cooks, laundresses, and tavern keepers but some were single prostitutes
 - I. Prospectors who did not strike it rich worked as miners for corporate mines, very dangerous work (1/30 was disabled, 1/80 killed). Heat stroke (>100°) or pneumonia (upon leaving the mine), cave ins, silicosis, carbon dioxide-related problems, etc., added to the danger of mines
- III. The Cattle Kingdom
- A. The open range (unfenced) of the West was perfect for the cattle industry, invented by Mexicans and transported via Texans through the West
 - B. Usually herds were moved by the Missouri Pacific Railroad but getting their was very difficult: transporting 260,000 head herds, over rough country, with outlaws everywhere
 - C. Chisholm Trail—this trail to Abilene, Kansas and the Kansas Pacific Railroad was the most important until many other cities further west sprang up after the mid-1870s
 - D. The romanticized sight of a the “long drive” consisted of rounding up huge herds, distinguishing with brands, and moving out; usually confederate veterans and African Americans were cowboys
 - E. Ranch—employer’s dwelling, quarters for employees, grazing land; open ranges turned into fenced ones with development. The industry was a risky one with thieves and disease to decimate herds
 - F. Competition with Farmers—“Range Wars” between farmers who fenced land and broke up the open range, sheepmen, and cattlemen sometimes resulted in property damage and loss of life
 - G. Because of claims that money would increase ninefold in four years, the ranching business became corporate but could not be sustained with overstocked fields, a broken open range, and bad climate from 1885-1887, decimating herds substantially
 - H. Although the open-range industry never recovered, established ranches thrived
 - I. West provided opportunity for women including suffrage (WY), political office, and sedentary ranching (250,000 women owned ranches and farms by 1890)
 - J. Political Gains for Women—women were allowed suffrage for many reasons
 1. Utah—to stave off criticism of polygamy
 2. Many states women were used to have a large enough electorate for statehood
 3. Women (the more “generous and virtuous” sex) were supposed to bring stability to politics

The Romance of the West

Since the first settlers came, the interior of America had a romantic appeal to white Anglo-Americans.

- I. The Western Landscape
 - A. “Rocky Mountain School”—painters (esp. Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran) painted grandiose canvases of landscapes emphasizing the ruggedness and dramatic variety of the region, reflecting the awe of the east that earlier painters saw
 - B. In the 1880s and 1890s, whites began to travel by railroads to resorts to experience the wonders of the wilderness
- II. The Cowboy Culture
 - A. Myth of the Cowboy—the cowboy was romanticized as a man with a free-spirited rugged lifestyle instead of the structured eastern culture. He was really a low-paid worker
 - B. Novels like Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* emphasized the cowboy’s affinity for nature and violence, along with his freedom, rather than his loneliness, tedium, and lack of advancement. Wild West Shows, pulp fiction, serious literature, and magazines also often focused on cowboys
 - C. The cowboy free-spirit and the open range is a celebrated idea today (Disney’s 2004 *Home on the Range*)
- III. The Idea of the Frontier
 - A. Romantic Image of the West—the last frontier idea caused a strong pull westward
 - B. In *Roughing It*, Mark Twain wrote about the romantic Nevada during the mine boom; he also wrote about the closer frontier of the Mississippi Valley in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with the theme of escape from tradition
 - C. Frederic Remington—one of the most beloved painters of the late 19th century, he romanticized the free spirit of the cowboy
 - D. Theodore Roosevelt—trying to recover from the death of his young wife, he explored the Dakota Badlands in the mid-1880s after dreaming about it his whole life; he wrote *The Winning of the West* (4 volumes), a romanticized account of the westward migration
- IV. Frederick Jackson Turner
 - A. Frederick Jackson Turner was a historian at the University of Wisconsin
 - B. At 33, he delivered the paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”
 - C. He argued that since there was so much settlement now, there was no longer a frontier line, marking a huge step in American development, the end of an era (the frontier thesis)
 - D. Although largely inaccurate because the land was previously occupied and much was to be discovered, he was generally right that grazing and farming land was established
- V. The Loss of Utopia
 - A. Psychological Loss—with the “passing of the frontier,” Americans had a sense of opportunities foreclosed; Henry Nash Smith (historian) in *Virgin Land* called “the myth of garden” that the west was a Garden of Eden for the American to start anew

- B. Helen Hunt Jackson's *Romona* (1884) is about a agrarian California before settlement full of rugged Hispanics and saintly missionaries
- C. "The setting of utopia, once the New World as a whole, had shrunk to the West of the United States. And now even that West seemed to be vanishing" (461)

The Dispersal of the Tribes (461–467)

Picturing a "virgin land," whites tried to expel Indians to fit their imagination of the west.

- I. White Tribal Policies
 - A. Although formal treaties were sometimes drawn up with independent tribes considered nations, white settlers' pressure to government often resulted in broken promises and stolen land
 - B. "Concentration Policy"—In 1851, tribes were assigned reservations in treaties negotiated by white-chosen "treaty chiefs;" reservations were scattered and easy to control, leaving desirable lands for white settlement but the theory did not stay long
 - C. Indian Peace Commission—in 1867, after bloody conflicts, a commission of soldiers and civilians bribed representatives of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Sioux, and others to agree to moving to large reservations (Oklahoma, Dakota)
 - D. Poorly Administered Reservations—The Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior was very corrupt
 - E. Buffalo hunting acted as attrition to Indian economy
 - 1. Buffalo were killed for food for Gold Rushers
 - 2. Easterners wanted buffalo hide coats from the romantic west
 - 3. Railroad companies hired hunters like Buffalo Bill Cody to kill buffalo who were obstacles to railroads
 - 4. Some Indian tribes (Blackfeet) hunted them for money
 - 5. Ecology—whites took up land from buffalo
 - 6. 15 million buffalo are decimated to a thousand in a decade
 - 7. Bureau of Indian Affairs supported killing buffalo to cause attrition of Indian economy
 - 8. Encouraged war
- II. The Indian Wars
 - A. Indian Resistance—attacks from 1850-1880 went from small raids on ranches, etc. to attacks on the US Army
 - B. Eastern Sioux (MN) killed 700 whites, 38 Indians hanged, exiled to Dakotas
 - C. Sand Creek Massacre
 - 1. Fighting between miners and Arapaho and Cheyenne (CO)
 - 2. Whites prepared to massacre attacking Indians and allowed friendly Indians to go to a camp to avoid the raid (1864)
 - 3. Led by Black Kettle, an Arapaho and Cheyenne band was attacked by Colonel J. M. Chivington and many drunks
 - 4. 133 people (105 women/children) killed
 - 5. Black Kettle escaped only to be killed by troops led by Colonel George A. Custer four years later (1868)
 - D. After the Civil War conflict was stepped up, especially in Montana when Red Cloud led Indians in a war of attrition against workers building a road that broke up the buffalo range
 - E. "Indian Hunting"—whites killed Indians as sport; bounty hunters brought skulls for money to those who financed the elimination
 - F. Government refused to negotiate any more treaties and wanted Indians to assimilate to a genuine "civilization"
 - G. New resistance, some led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull
 - H. Little Bighorn—2500 warriors massacred and killed 264 whites including George A. Custer
 - I. Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull's tribes were attacked, Sioux weakened, they were later killed by reservation police
 - J. Nez Percé killed 4 whites when they were drunk
 - K. Chief Joseph—led a band of Nez Percé in flight over 1000 miles in 75 days and then gave up to be shipped all over the US
 - L. Chiricahua Apaches, last to resist whites
 - M. "Ghost Dance"—Sioux in trouble turn to religious prophet, Wovoka, recommended mass "Ghost Dance" to bring about the coming of a Messiah, a white retreat, and help buffalo
 - N. Wounded Knee—7th Cavalry (Custer's regiment) massacred 200 starving Indian (mostly women and children), losing about 40
- III. The Dawes Act
 - A. New policy without reservations for "vanishing race" of Indians to force them to assimilate to white society
 - B. Assimilation—the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 gave land to Indians that they couldn't sell for 25 years to keep them from losing it; forced assimilation, took children to white Christian boarding schools
 - C. Indians were not ready, resisted, Burke Act of 1906 also tried to force assimilation
 - D. There was no answer, Indian interests conflicted with that of the expanding whites

The Rise and Decline of the Western Farmer (467–470)

Farmers poured into the West, assuming Indian lands and challenging ranchers in the 1870s; after flourishing for about ten years, agriculture in the West and the rest of America began a decline because there was no market for all of the goods.

- I. Farming of the Plains
 - A. Railroads including the Transcontinental Railroad were great achievements that contributed very much to westward expansion
 - A. Of greater importance were subsidiary lines promoted by states with financial aid
 - B. Key Role of the Railroad—railroad companies set low rates, promoted settlement for mercenary reasons, and sold their land at low prices
 - C. Climate—rainfall increased, dispelling idea of a desert

- D. Barbed Wire—fencing was a problem, wood was too expensive, two Illinois farmers developed barbed wire, the new standard of fencing
- E. Water was an issue: the west relied on irrigation, controlling water, and who controlled water were questions
- F. Drought—after a wet climate, farmers faced drought and resisted with dust-blanket tillage (dryland farming), wells, and drought-resistant crops but no large-scale irrigation projects could be facilitated
- G. Hard Times for Farmers—excessive agriculture in the nation coupled with expensive production in the west caused farmers to go in ruinous debt; a reverse migration occurred after farmers sold farms

II. Commercial Agriculture

- A. The romantic independent farmer was replaced by commercial farmers who specialized in cash crops to raise their living standards but were dependent on interest rates
- B. Agriculture increased worldwide in the Americas, Russia, and the South Pacific; since domestic markets could not use all the goods, they relied on an international market
Consequences of Overproduction—prices dropped and farm families were forced out of their trade

III. The Farmers' Grievances

- A. Farmers criticized railroads freight rates for agriculture because they were more than for other goods
- B. They resented banks and the lack of currency...demanded increase in currency volume
- C. Controlled by economic forces beyond their control, farmers would plant huge crops when prices were high and then harvest when prices were low as a result of luck
- D. Middlemen benefited themselves at the farmers' expense
- E. Farmers believed the East was conspiring against them

IV. The Agrarian Malaise

- A. Isolation—farms were huge, spread out over vast areas so most farmers saw human life only once in a while; they had no recreation and were made fun of by the urban population as “hayseeds;” their own children left for cities
- B. Caused a discontent, spurring a political movement
- C. Although romanticized, they felt differently
- D. The agrarian “backbone of American life” was falling to the urban-industrial society of the East

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