A Transformed Nation: The West and the New South, 1865–1900

The Golden Spike
This carefully posed scene records the merging of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads at Promontory Point, Utah, on May 10, 1869, to create the nation’s first transcontinental railroad. A celebration of the industrialization of the American West, the photograph includes hundreds of white laborers, but reflects the racial prejudice of the time in excluding Chinese railroad workers who also played a central role in building the railroad.
“How I do wish you could all come out here,” the new Kansas homesteader Mary Abell wrote to her family back east in 1871. “It is such a beautiful country—I did not know there was anything so beautiful in the whole world as the country we passed over in coming here.” Just arrived from New York with her husband, Abell was clearly excited about the prospect of a new life in the West: “Robert has got a piece of land that suits him,” she told her sister. “It seems so fortunate.” She knew there was much to do in the days ahead—“There is a house to be built fences to make—a well to be dug and a cow to be got.” But Abell didn’t seem to mind: “I should never be content to live East now,” she said. “Things there would look very little.”

Abell was part of a great wave of settlement in the post–Civil War era that would transform the West. From 1865 to 1890, the white population in the trans-Mississippi west increased some 400 percent to 8,628,000—a figure that includes both native-born and white immigrants. The dream of western lands also inspired many African Americans, whose cherished hopes for liberty led hundreds of thousands to leave the South for points west from 1880 to 1910. At the same time, immigrants from China, Mexico, and other countries were drawn to the economic opportunities of the West as part of a global movement of peoples in this period.

All of these men and women were driven by desires for a better life, but their desires often conflicted with the rights and desires of the diverse peoples who already inhabited the West, including a variety of Indian cultures and societies; borderlands villages of Spanish-speaking peoples; settlements of Chinese miners and laborers; and Mexicans in California, among others. Settlement set in motion conflict and resistance in numerous places. Who would gain power over Western lands? Whose liberty would be respected? What efforts would be made to achieve equality—or deny equality—to all of these peoples? This chapter explores the transformation of the West and the South during the late 19th century, part of a larger process of industrialization in this period.
The Homestead Act

Mary Abell and her husband were able to become homesteaders because of a remarkable piece of legislation that took effect on January 1, 1863—the same day that the Emancipation Proclamation became law. Meant to provide free land for western settlers, the Homestead Act was the result of a dream that stretched back decades. “Go West, young man!” had been a famous saying during the 1850s, associated with an extended campaign for a homestead law by newspaper editor Horace Greeley. The saying embodied a cherished American ideal: the belief that individual ownership of land by farmers was at the heart of a virtuous citizenry and a sound democratic republic. That ideal had fueled Jeffersonian agrarianism, too.

In the 1850s, many people believed that a western “safety valve” was necessary to ward off the potential evils of industrialization, urbanization, and capitalist expansion. Free land in the West would help prevent a system of perpetual wage labor, or “wage slavery,” by allowing individual farmers to support themselves. Thus free land would ultimately help preserve American values of democratic individualism.

In fact, the provisions of the Homestead Act were remarkably egalitarian for their day—at least up to a point. Both men and unmarried women were eligible to file for up to 160 acres of surveyed land in the public domain, as long as they were over the age of 21. (Married women were assumed to be dependents of their homesteading husbands.) Immigrants who affirmed their intention to become citizens were also eligible. As long as homesteaders lived on the land for five years, not only cultivating it but also “improving” it by building a house or barn, they could receive full title for a fee of only $10. Utilizing these provisions, white homesteaders ultimately claimed some 285 million acres of land, a remarkable redistribution of public acreage by the government.

But we need to consider the Act’s costs as well. Despite a surface egalitarianism, the Homestead Act privileged white farmers over African Americans and Hispanics, who rarely had the resources necessary to homestead. After all, even free land required tools, seed, plus often costly transportation to a far-away place: experts in the Agriculture Department estimated such needs at $1,000, an unimaginably large amount for most Americans at the time. The act denied access to Chinese laborers, who could not become U.S. citizens and had few property rights. It made no provisions for the truly poor in eastern cities.

But the Act’s most obvious cost was its severe impact on such groups as New Mexico sheepherders or Native Americans for whom such settlement did not open up land but instead took it away. The Homestead Act was in fact part of a larger process of conquest, driven by the twin pressures of industrialization and white settlement, through which Indians were irrevocably stripped of their lands.

A final problem with the Act was extensive corruption in its implementation. Those who agitated for a Homestead Act in the antebellum period had been fueled by a sense of idealism. Ironically, however, through chicanery, outright fraud, and government giveaways, more public land actually fell into the hands of railroads and other corporations, as well as speculators, than into the hands of individual farmers during this period. Clearly, this result was not the intention of the Homestead Act’s framers, but it did reflect the new power of an emerging corporate order (see chapter 19).

Was the Homestead Act a success or failure in American life? To younger sons in Norwegian or German farm families who could expect to inherit no land at home, the opportunity to obtain 160 acres in Minnesota or Nebraska seemed miraculous. But that perspective was not shared by Native Americans. This chapter explores the complex answers to that seemingly simple question as part of a
broader examination of the industrialization of the West, a process that went into high gear after the Civil War.

An Industrializing West

Focus Question  How did the industrialization of the West affect Americans in different ways?

Traditionally, historians have associated industrialization with the East in the post–Civil War era, but in fact the West also industrialized in this period. That industrialization had many linked components: settlement of the West, including the creation of farms, communities, and western cities; production of commodities such as cattle and timber that could be shipped east; the creation of western consumers and thus the demand for manufactured goods; the extensive extraction of resources through mining and logging; and the ability to ship commodities efficiently using a nationally linked transportation network. These western processes of resource extraction may have looked different from the factory-centered industrialization that developed in the East and Midwest at this time (see chapter 19), but they still involved the transformation of an agrarian economy to an industrial society. Like eastern industrialization, western industrialization also had global reach, pulling immigrants from China, Peru, Chile, Hawaii, European countries, and Mexico to the already diverse West.

Railroads

Nothing was more important to the industrialization of the West than the railroad. Just as free land for homesteaders was a long-held dream for many Americans, so, too, was the creation of a transcontinental railroad that would link East and West and allow the transportation of people and commodities over long distances. The two dreams were connected: the settlement of the West would be greatly facilitated by the extension of the railroad into far-flung territory. Thus it was no accident that in 1862, the year the government passed the Homestead Act, it also passed the Pacific Railroad Bill, which provided large loans and extremely generous subsidies of land to two railroad companies, the Union Pacific (working west) and the Central Pacific (working east), in order to enable them to build a transcontinental line stretching from Omaha, Nebraska, to Sacramento, California. (Railroad lines already existed from Omaha to the East.) Two years later, the government also provided a substantial monetary subsidy for each mile of track laid in the West. Ultimately, the government would give away 131 million acres of land to support transcontinental railroads, including huge land subsidies to three additional railroads: the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (following the Santa Fe Trail between Missouri and the Southwest); the Southern Pacific (from Southern California to New Orleans); and the Northern Pacific (from the Great Lakes to the Columbia River).
These lavish subsidies set off a frenzy of railroad building; they also made a few individuals very rich, including the “Big Four” of the Central Pacific: Leland Stanford, Collis P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins, and Charles Crocker. Big in every way (they collectively weighed 860 pounds), the four men had come to California during the Gold Rush and had shrewdly sized up its entrepreneurial opportunities. They now avidly seized the historic opportunity at hand and formed a partnership that effectively split up the work necessary in such a giant task, including the work of influencing lawmakers. Like so many others involved in the notoriously corrupt postwar railway boom, they were not shy about using bribery or graft to achieve their aims. The leader of the Union Pacific, Thomas C. Durant, was not shy either, having been the chief architect of the scandalous Crédit Mobilier scheme (see chapter 17).

Having provided generous subsidies, the government expected the railroads to obtain their own financing, and so various railroads sold millions of dollars of stocks or bonds, many selling as much stock as the market would bear without much relationship to the actual value of the railroads. This “watered” stock was part of the runaway corruption that surrounded financing railroads. The Big Four participated wholeheartedly in this corruption, creating construction contracts, for instance, that paid them $90 million for work that only cost them $32.2 million.

Once financing had been arranged for this complex venture, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific embarked on a daunting task that would engage some 20,000 workers at a time. From 1865 on, the two railroads raced against one another, as whoever laid the most track stood to gain. The leader of the Union Pacific, Thomas C. Durant, was not shy either, having been the chief architect of the scandalous Crédit Mobilier scheme (see chapter 17).

Having provided generous subsidies, the government expected the railroads to obtain their own financing, and so various railroads sold millions of dollars of stocks or bonds, many selling as much stock as the market would bear without much relationship to the actual value of the railroads. This “watered” stock was part of the runaway corruption that surrounded financing railroads. The Big Four participated wholeheartedly in this corruption, creating construction contracts, for instance, that paid them $90 million for work that only cost them $32.2 million.

Once financing had been arranged for this complex venture, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific embarked on a daunting task that would engage some 20,000 workers at a time. From 1865 on, the two railroads raced against one another, as whoever laid the most track stood to gain in government subsidies as well as later commerce. The Union Pacific employed primarily Irish laborers, while the Central Pacific employed a workforce that was by 1867 almost 90 percent Chinese. All worked almost constantly.

### Chinese Laborers and the Railroads

A global economy had drawn thousands of Chinese laborers to California during the Gold Rush, beginning in 1849. Mostly peasants emigrating from the Pearl River delta of Guangdong Province in southeast China, they were pushed from home by poverty and unstable political conditions related to China’s defeat in the British Opium Wars; they were pulled to America by their hope to make a better living in “Gold Mountain.” While only a few hundred men emigrated in 1849 and 1850, by the mid-1850s, thousands of Chinese immigrants arrived annually. By 1870, there were some 63,000 Chinese in the United States, with over three-quarters settled in California.

Almost entirely men, Chinese immigrants intended to be sojourners, not permanent settlers: they planned to take their hard-earned savings home to the wives and families they had left behind. At first they worked as independent prospectors panning for gold, but as gold profits dwindled, they moved into other areas of work. In the 1860s, labor contractors in China actively recruited young men to come to America to build the transcontinental railroad, as well as to work as agricultural laborers, to develop fisheries and vineyards, and to help reclaim California swamplands. Some 12,000 Chinese laborers ultimately built the Central Pacific Railroad, often under exceptionally harsh conditions, and with substantially less pay than white laborers.

Even before they began working on the railroads, Chinese miners and laborers faced extremes of prejudice from white nativists. In 1850, the California State legislature responded to anti-foreigner agitation with a Foreign Miners’ Tax aimed at all foreigners; two years later, the legislature specifically targeted Chinese immigrants. Western labor leaders, particularly Dennis Kearney of the Workingman’s Party of California, inflamed nativist crowds of white workers with anti-Chinese rhetoric: in 1877, during the national Great Railway Strike (see chapter 19), mobs of white workers rioted against Chinese workers in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Violence against Chinese workers occurred in numerous places in the West during the 1870s and 1880s, including a massacre in Rock Springs, Colorado, after the Union Pacific Railroad decided to hire Chinese workers. Twenty-eight Chinese died in an attack that included burning down Chinese homes; similar attacks soon occurred throughout the West.

At the local level, Chinese immigrants faced a host of discriminatory ordinances specifically targeting them, from queue ordinances regulating the length of men’s hair (and thus targeting the distinctive braid worn by Chinese men); to sidewalk ordinances preventing the carrying of baskets on shoulders. At the state level, California laws denied Chinese the right to own land, to testify in court, to intermarry with whites, and to immigrate. Under these conditions, Chinese workers created communities of their own against stiff odds. Yet by 1850, a thriving Chinatown had emerged in San Francisco, and Chinese sections emerged in numerous communities throughout the West.

In 1882, the federal government weighed in with its first discriminatory law targeting a specific immigrant group. The Chinese Exclusion Act suspended Chinese immigration for 10 years with the exception of a few job categories such as merchants. Interest in trade with China dictated against preventing immigration by wealthy businessmen, but the virulent white nativism that had taken hold throughout the West encouraged Congress to outlaw Chinese laborers, who supposedly endangered “the good order of certain localities.” The Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed in 1892. That the Exclusion Act achieved its aim can be seen in the declining population of Chinese in this
period: from 105,465 in 1880 to 89,863 in 1900, during a period in which immigration swelled for other groups (for more on Chinese immigrants, see chapter 20).

The Golden Spike

By the early spring of 1869, what one commentator called the “irrepressible railroad” was almost an accomplished fact. The only question was where East and West would meet. In the final stages of track-laying, the two railroads—which would receive money, after all, based on miles of track built—actually built some track parallel to one another before finally being instructed by no less than President Grant to determine a meeting point.

The result, on May 10, 1869, was the historic driving of a “golden spike” in Promontory, Utah, to mark the merging of the two lines. Present that day, we know from the historical record, were “men of every color, creed, and nationality,” including the Chinese laborers who had built the railroad and laid the very last track. But official photographs of the event leave them out—a silence that speaks volumes about racial prejudice at the time.

This first transcontinental railroad was soon followed by others, although there were numerous difficulties and abortive attempts. The Northern Pacific ran out of capital in 1873 and went into receivership; the Santa Fe fell short of its goal. Still, by 1893, a total of five trans-continental railroads would be in service, and track mileage west of the Mississippi would increase from 3,272 miles at the end of the Civil War to 72,473 miles. No single factor was as important to the industrialization of the West as the building of railroads, which provided an internal infrastructure for the western economy as well as connection to eastern markets.

Railroads and Borderlands Communities

Railroads also changed ordinary people’s lives across the West. The arrival of the railroads, as well as the Anglo settlers who followed swiftly in their wake, dramatically changed established patterns of life in the borderlands communities of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. In the 1870s, Hispanic villagers living communally in this area maintained an economy that included grazing sheep and cattle on the open range, as well as freighting—the transportation of goods by wagons. That way of life had not changed much even in the wake of the conquest and annexation of the northern provinces of Mexico by the United States in 1848.

But the coming of the railroads in the 1880s put new pressure on Hispanic village life. In places like Rio Arriba County, New Mexico, Hispanic villagers who had done a thriving trade hauling goods found their livelihood replaced by the railroads. As a result, communities that had combined trade with grazing and farming were now forced to go back only to farming and grazing, even though this combination had never produced quite enough for their needs. Even worse, in a pattern repeated throughout the West, Hispanic villagers found that Anglo settlement and fencing of once-open lands reduced the available range for grazing.

As Anglo-owned livestock companies moved in, bringing in better breeds and buying up grazing land, they began to squeeze out the Hispanic farmers. With fewer sources of income, by the 1890s, villagers were starting to depend on credit for the first time, borrowing money from an Anglo merchant to fund their grazing, and in the turbulent economy of that decade, many of them were unable to pay their debts. The end result was the loss of their sheep—and livelihood—to Anglo businessmen who had extended credit to them. Many ended up working for livestock companies, sometimes caring for herds they had once owned themselves. Eventually others ended up as miners, forced to become wage laborers.

Resentment became active resistance in the 1880s, when a secret organization, las Gorras Blancas (White Caps), rode mostly at night to cut fences, tear up railroad track, and burn bridges. “Our purpose is to protect the rights of the people in general and especially those of the helpless classes,” the group declared in its platform. But the group had only limited success in achieving these goals. There was no question that industrialization had transformed lives in the borderlands, making many formerly independent producers newly dependent on corporations.

Mining

A similar process held true in mining. The California Gold Rush of 1849 and the early 1850s had drawn miners from across the United States—and from Mexico, Europe, China, Chile, and other countries, as well—to pan for gold. After the Civil War, mining continued to be part of a global industrial economy, but the image of the individual prospector striking it rich on his own claim became increasingly quaint. By the 1870s, the majority of miners were wage laborers who worked for corporations, not for themselves. Mining was big business, with groups of investors consolidating holdings in some of the richest mines. George Hearst, for instance, began by investing in 1859 in the legendary Comstock Lode in Nevada—the richest vein of silver in America. “If you’re ever inclined to think that there’s no such thing as luck,” Hearst remarked, “just think of me.” In 1877, Hearst and business partners...
bought the Homestake Mine in the Black Hills, and then enriched their holdings still further by buying up the claims of surrounding miners. Other financiers invested in the industries related to mining, including railroads, lumber companies, and smelters.

Gold Rush miners had worked the surface of the earth with picks, shovels, and tin pans, but as this placer mining gave out, miners and mining companies developed new technologies to extract ore, whether on the surface of the earth or underground. **Hydraulic mining**, used as early as the 1850s, employed high-pressure jets of water to wash away banks of earth and even mountains in order to extract gold. By the 1880s, hydraulic mining produced 90 percent of California's gold, but it also ravaged the environment, tearing away indiscriminately at earth, boulders, and trees, and leaving desolate landscapes in its wake. The debris (tailings) from hydraulic mining clogged rivers and caused floods, ruining farms with muddy waste. Other types of mining destroyed landscapes as well, with copper mining in particular creating strip-mining moonscapes.

Railroads played a central role in the development of industrial mining. It wasn't just that they allowed access to mines; they also made it possible to perform a new kind of mining late in the century. Gold discoveries had propelled the first waves of western settlement, but by the 1870s, silver eclipsed gold in volume and some years even in value. Mining of copper became profitable with the arrival of the railroads, as they for the first time allowed transportation of huge quantities of ore. In the mining town of Butte, Montana, mining had centered around diminishing supplies of silver up until 1881. But the arrival of railroads that year made it possible to extract Butte's rich lode of copper, known as the “richest hill on earth.” The same held true for large-scale copper mining in southern Arizona, which was also catalyzed by the arrival of the railroads in the 1880s. Such large-scale resource extraction was at the heart of western industrialization.

Miners’ working conditions grew steadily worse by the end of the century in the heavily mechanized hard-rock mines. Mining on the Comstock Lode involved work in mines with temperatures of well over 100 degrees—sometimes as much as 150 degrees deep underground. Miners died of the heat, of poor ventilation, of the release of toxic gases, and of accidents with mining equipment. Accidents disabled one out of every 30 miners in the 1870s. By the end of the 19th century, mining was the most dangerous industry in the country.

Unions struggled with varying degrees of success to gain a foothold in the 1870s and 1880s, but with wage cuts in the early 1890s, there was a new burst of labor radicalism and resistance. A violent confrontation between miners and the National Guard occurred at Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in 1892; the next year, individual mining unions met at Butte, Montana, to form the **Western Federation of Miners (WFM)**, whose radical politics included a call to transform the American economic system. In 1893, a violent strike at Cripple Creek, Colorado, centered around mine owners’ attempts to move from an eight-hour to a ten-hour day. These strikes were part of nationwide labor activism and resistance in the 1890s (see chapter 19). The WFM would ultimately be important in helping to found the 20th-century Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) (see chapter 20). The IWW’s leader, William “Big Bill” Haywood, remembered being approached by a WFM organizer as a young man in Idaho. “I had never heard of the need of workingmen organizing for mutual protection,” Haywood said, but he soon became a leader of the WFM himself. The industrialization of the West became a radicalizing political experience for many.

**Ranching**

It wasn’t just miners who went on strike: by the 1880s, even some cowboys attempted strikes for better pay and better working conditions. The idea of a striking cowboy initially goes against the grain: this mythic figure in American life symbolizes solitary, rugged individualism, after all. But cowboys were also employees; and increasingly in the late 19th century, they were employees of large industrial corporations. Contrary to most Hollywood images, they were also a diverse group: among trail cowboys, approximately one-third were African American, Mexican, or Indian.

**Cattle Drives and the Open Range**

A postwar boom in the range cattle industry had its beginnings in southern Texas. The Spaniards had introduced longhorn cattle there in the 18th century. This hardy breed multiplied rapidly; by the 1850s, millions of them roamed freely on the Texas plains. The market for them was limited in this sparsely settled region; the nearest railhead was usually too far distant to make shipping them north and east economically feasible.

The Civil War changed all that. Beef supplies in the older states dropped drastically, and prices rose to the unheard-of sum of $40 per head. The postwar explosion of population and railroads westward brought markets and railheads ever closer to western cattle that were free to anyone who rounded them up and branded them.

Astute Texans quickly saw that the longhorns represented a fortune on the hoof—if they could be driven northward the 800 miles to the railhead at Sedalia, Missouri.
In spring 1866, cowboys hit the trail with 260,000 cattle in the first of the great drives. Disease, stampedes, bad weather, Indians, and irate farmers in Missouri (who were afraid that the Texas fever carried by some of the longhorns would infect their own stock) killed or ran off most of the cattle.

Only a few thousand head made it to Sedalia, but the prices they fetched convinced ranchers that the system would work, if only they could find a better route. By 1867, the rails of the Kansas Pacific had reached Abilene, Kansas, 150 miles closer to Texas, making it possible to drive the herds through a sparsely occupied portion of Indian Territory. About 35,000 longhorns reached Abilene that summer, where they were loaded onto cattle cars for the trip to Kansas City or Chicago. This success resulted in the interlocking institutions of the cattle drive and the Chicago stockyards. The development of refrigerated rail cars in the 1870s enabled Chicago to ship dressed beef all over the country. Abilene mushroomed overnight from a sleepy village whose one bartender spent his spare time catching prairie dogs into a boomtown where 25 saloons stayed open all night, and the railroad made almost as much money shipping liquor into town as it did shipping cattle out.
More than a million longhorns bellowed their way north on the Chisholm Trail to Abilene over the next four years, while the railhead crept westward to other Kansas towns, chiefly Dodge City, which became the most wide-open and famous of the cow towns. As buffalo and Indians disappeared from the grasslands north of Texas, ranches moved northward to take their place. Cattle drives grew shorter as railroads inched forward. Ranchers grazed their cattle for free on millions of acres of open, unfenced government land. But clashes with “grangers” (the ranchers’ contemptuous term for farmers), on the one hand, and with a growing army of sheep ranchers on the other—not to mention rustlers—led to several “range wars.” Most notable was the Johnson County War in Wyoming in 1892. Grangers and small ranchers there (who had sometimes gotten their start by rustling) defeated the hired guns of the Stock Growers’ Association, which represented larger ranchers.

By that time, however, the classic form of open-range grazing was already in decline. The boom years of the early 1880s had overstocked the range and driven down prices. Then came record cold and blizzards on the southern range in winter 1884–85, followed by even worse weather on the northern plains two years later. Hundreds of thousands of cattle froze or starved to death. These catastrophes spurred reforms that ended open-range grazing. The ranchers who survived turned to growing hay and supplemental feed for the winter. They reduced the size of their herds, started buying or leasing land and fencing in their cattle, and invested in scientific breeding that crossed longhorns with higher-quality stock to produce a better grade of beef.

### The Industrialization of Ranching

As open-range grazing declined, more industrialized ranching expanded. We don’t usually think of ranching as an industrial process—industrialization tends to conjure up images of eastern factories belching smoke—but in fact major ranching companies operated as big businesses by the end of the century. As historian David Igler has shown, by 1900, the California corporation Miller & Lux was one of the largest industrial enterprises in the country, having integrated raising cattle on vast landholdings together with meatpacking in San Francisco. Its two founding partners were both ambitious German immigrants who had
An Industrializing West

Oklahoma!

HISTORY THROUGH FILM

OKLAHOMA! (1955)

Directed by Fred Zinnemann.
Starring Gordon MacRae (Curly); Shirley Jones (Laurey);
and Rod Steiger (Jud).

Only a history textbook would ask you to connect
the great Rodgers & Hammerstein musical
Oklahoma! to the range wars of the late-19th-century
West. But think about it: when the cast sings “The
Farmer and the Cowman” during a square dance,
right before launching into a colorful fistfight, they
express the different worldviews of farmers and
cattle ranchers. “Whyn’t those dirtscratchers stay
in Missouri where they belong?” asks a cowman,
and another protests, the farmer “come out west
and built a lot of fences! And built ‘em right acrost
our cattle ranges!” It’s up to the song’s refrain to tell
us how to resolve this dispute:

The farmer and the cowman should be friends,
Oh, the farmer and the cowman should be friends.
The other likes to chase a cow,
But that’s no reason why they cain’t be friends.

The song is every bit as campy as these lyrics
indicate, and if you never got a chance to see (or be
in) a school production in high school, then you could
do worse than to rush out and rent a copy of the
1955 movie Oklahoma!, based on the extraordinarily
popular Broadway musical of 1943. The dancing
cowboys alone are worth the price of admission.

But don’t be fooled: Oklahoma! isn’t really about
Oklahoma, even if it is set in 1907 right before the
territory became a state. It’s really about a mythic West-
ern space in Americans’ imagination, where Ameri-
cans come together in harmony at square dances and
box suppers and where a cowboy like the masculine
hero Curly is no wage laborer for life, but instead is
about to become a prosperous farmer. Oklahoma!
may be set in Indian Territory, but there are no Native
Americans here. It is an entirely white, native-born
world except for the peddler Ali Hakim, and he is
clearly just passing through. There’s certainly no indica-
tion of Oklahoma’s arid climate and the devastating
drought of the Great Depression, which would have
been in recent memory when the musical was written
in 1943. In fact, some of the people associated with
the musical were uneasy about the title “Oklahoma,”
precisely because they were afraid it would remind
audiences of the “Okies,” the poverty-stricken farm-
ers forced to flee the arid plains during the Depression.
Instead, this is a world of green abundance where
“the corn is as high as an elephant’s eye.” The only
shadow in this sunlit world with its “bright golden haze
on the meadow” is Jud, the hired hand.

And perhaps that’s why Jud is the most interest-
ing character in this movie musical. Played with a
heavy, menacing scowl by no less than Rod Steiger,
Jud is the dark side of the Western dream, a man
with a deep violent streak (unlike the boys-will-be-
boys scuffling of the cowboys) and an unhealthy
liking for “girly pictures.” All of these negative quali-
ties are loaded onto his status as the “hired hand”;
he provides an uneasy reminder that class did exist in
the West and that not everyone was on the brink of
becoming prosperous. Jud is the only real problem in
the mythic world of Oklahoma!, and the musical blithely dispatches
him by having him fall on his own
knife in a fight with Curly.

A huge hit right in the midst
of World War II, the show’s deter-
mined American exuberance and
confidence struck deep chords.
The show’s brilliant choreographer
Agnes DeMille remembered that
soldiers and sailors would stand
weeping at the back of the the-
ater, so deeply did Oklahoma!
evoke what they considered the
essence of America. “Oh, what a
beautiful mornin’,” sings Curly at
the beginning, and it reassured
Americans that having grown up
on that mythic frontier, they were
at the dawn of a new era.
started out working as butchers in San Francisco but quickly moved into ownership of their own shops: despite their remarkably similar backgrounds—or perhaps because of them—they never liked each other much. Still, they were enormously successful business partners, building a corporation that shared many similarities with other large companies in the late 19th century. Mobilizing large amounts of capital, they employed over a thousand laborers in extensive operations that tightly connected ranchlands with the city.

**Industrial Cowboys**

Cowboys did not just ride the open range in the Texan cattle drives that have became the stuff of legend; they also rode the extensive Miller & Lux landholdings. Before the 1870s, the most valuable of the firm’s cowboys were *vaqueros*, Mexican cowboys who rounded up cattle, branded them, and drove them to San Francisco. The tradition of *vaqueros* had arrived in the New World with the Spanish, who introduced herding by men on horseback. By the late 19th century, the raising of cattle herds by *vaqueros* had been practiced for centuries in California. Not surprisingly, the head *vaquero* at Miller & Lux was a Mexican American, Rafael Cuen. His was a position of skill, and he was given a great deal of respect. Yet his salary was not as high as that of the white workers in the corporation who occupied parallel positions of authority, reflecting prevalent discrimination against Mexicans; it’s possible this carried an especially sharp sting given the fact that his father had once owned (and lost) a piece of the Miller & Lux land. After the 1870s, the arrival of railroads took a toll on the positions of *vaqueros* like Cuen: cattle were shipped to market by rail.

**Mexican Americans**

Throughout the late 19th century, Mexican Americans, many of whom had owned their land for generations, lost both property and political influence to the incoming Anglo-American settlers. Many elite *Californios* who were ranchers in southern California, for instance, had to sell their lands to pay outstanding debts after devastating droughts in the 1860s virtually destroyed the ranching industry. But even as early as 1849 in the northern California goldfields, resentment of “foreigners” provoked violence against Mexican American miners—and the Foreign Miners’ Tax of 1850 effectively forced Mexican Americans out of the goldfields (even though they were not “foreigners”). As the 19th century progressed, hordes of Anglo-American “squatters” invaded the expansive holdings of the Mexican American elite, *Californios* who were forced to seek relief in the courts. Although their claims were generally upheld, these legal proceedings often stretched on for years. After exorbitant legal fees and other expenses were taken into account, a legal triumph was often a Pyrrhic victory. In the end, most Mexican American landholders in

---

**Destruction of the Buffalo**

Historians estimate that as many as 30 million bison (popularly called buffalo) once roamed the grasslands of North America. By the mid-19th century, however, expansion of the European American settlement, the demand for buffalo robes in the European and eastern U.S. markets, and competition from Indian horses for grazing lands had reduced the herds by many millions. Such pressures intensified after the Civil War—as railroads penetrated the West and new technology enabled tanners to process buffalo hides for leather. Professional hunters flocked to the range and systematically killed the bison. By the 1880s, the buffalo were almost extinct, leaving behind millions of bones, which were gathered in piles, as in this photograph of buffalo skulls, and shipped to plants that ground them into fertilizer.
northern California, like those in southern California, had to sell the very lands they had fought to keep in order to pay their mounting debts.

Elsewhere, the migration of Anglos into eastern Texas had played a role in fomenting the war for Texas independence and in bringing about the war with Mexico (see chapter 13). By the latter half of the 19th century, eastern Texas was overwhelmingly Anglo; most Tejanos (people of Mexican origin or descent) were concentrated in the Rio Grande Valley of southern Texas. As in California, Anglos in Texas used force and intimidation, coupled with exploitative legal maneuvering, to disenfranchise the Tejanos. The Texas Rangers often acted as an Anglo vigilante force that exacted retribution for the real or imagined crimes of Mexican Americans. Eventually, Mexican Americans in Texas were reduced to a state of peonage, dependent on their Anglo protectors for political and economic security.

Similar patterns prevailed in New Mexico, but the effects were mitigated somewhat because New Mexicans continued to outnumber Anglo-American settlers. Earlier in the 19th century, international trade along the Santa Fe Trail had strengthened the political and economic status of the New Mexican elites. Now these same elites consolidated their position by acting as power brokers between poorer New Mexicans and wealthy Anglos. Despite such difficult conditions, Spanish-speaking peoples maintained their cultural traditions in the face of Anglo settlement, with the Roman Catholic Church serving as an important center of community life. An influx of immigrants from Mexico toward the end of the century created a new basis for community as well.

Itinerant Laborers

The vaquero Rafael Cuen was a highly skilled worker of great value to his employer; he was one of the lucky employees who had long-term employment. But for many workers in the West, itinerancy was the norm; a virtual army of workers and wanderers traveled the western countryside. Most low-level jobs in ranching were seasonal, meaning that workers were forced to move from place to place periodically in search of work. And as western industrialization uprooted many workers from their traditional lives, more and more people took to the road. As Henry George said in his bestselling 1879 book Progress and Poverty, a scathing indictment of the current economic system, “the ‘tramp’ comes with the locomotive.” For George, who had been a prospector before becoming a newspaper editor in California, the fault lay in a system of “land monopoly” that allowed control of land and resources by the few at the expense of the many.

At Miller & Lux, itinerant laborers were Chinese, Portuguese, Italian, Mexican, and Mexican American, in addition to white, native-born Americans. One of the itinerant laborers who hired on to an irrigation crew was a man named Joseph Warren Matthews, a farmer who had heavy debts. To pay these debts, he had taken on a series of grueling temporary jobs, including wage labor for a lumber company in the Pacific Northwest, work in the Alaskan goldfields, pipe laying for a water company, ore smelting, and digging ditches. His situation underlined the precariousness of many lives in the industrializing West.

Homesteading and Farming

Many homesteaders and farmers shared that precariousness: not only were 49 percent of all homesteaders unable to “prove up” their claims, but many were ultimately forced off their homesteads by the unforgiving climate of the Great Plains.

For much of the antebellum period, the Great Plains were known as the Great American Desert and assumed to be uninhabitable. By the 1850s, however, many boosters of western expansion promoted the idea that the Great Plains were a potentially lush American garden perfect for settlement. In this view, aridity was not a problem; the folk belief that “rainfall follows the plow”—that settlement would somehow prevent droughts—even gained credence among some geologists and other experts.

A great wave of settlement of the Great Plains occurred during the late 1870s to the mid-1880s, when rainfall was in fact relatively abundant. But the truth was that the average normal rainfall on the plains west of the 98th meridian (a line running roughly from the center of the Dakotas through the center of Texas) was scarcely enough to support farming except in certain river valleys. Years of drought inevitably followed, beginning in 1886 and lasting through the mid-1890s—and fueling farmers’ discontent and protests (see chapter 19). Homesteaders and farmers in Minnesota, Iowa, and parts of Kansas and Nebraska were relatively lucky because those areas offered rich soil and adequate rainfall. In Iowa, for instance, farmers had great success with a “corn and hog” farm economy. But other land was arid and unproductive, producing heartbreak for homesteaders and farmers. Between 1888 and 1892, half the population of Kansas and Nebraska was forced to give up and move back east to Illinois or Iowa.

The Experience of Homesteading

Homesteading families on the Great Plains literally built their houses from the ground up: in an environment without trees, they cut the dense prairie sod into blocks and
stacked them up to form walls, providing a small window and a door in a “soddy” of around 18 by 24 feet. Soddies were a practical solution to a difficult problem on the plains, but they were also dark, dank, and claustrophobic.

As Kansas homesteader Mary Abell (an excerpt from one of her letters opens this chapter) explained to her sister: “Imagine living in a place dug out of the side of a hill (one side to the weather with door and window—top covered with dirt and you have our place of abode). No one east would think of putting pigs in such a place.” Abell’s letters from 1871 to 1875 made clear the hard labor involved in homesteading: in addition to caring for five children, in the fall of 1873, she had been her husband’s “sole help in getting up and stacking at least 25 tons of hay and oats.” Less than a week later, “one of those dreadful prairie fires” swept through the Abells’ land, and they lost not only their hay and oats but also chickens and farm equipment. In 1874, she faced both drought and grasshoppers, and wrote her family that “none of you have the least conception” of “actual want, destitution.” In 1875, Abell died at the age of 29.

Of course, not all homesteaders faced the same dire straits. Many of the 4 million immigrants who came from Germany, the Czech region of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and the Scandinavian countries from 1865 to 1890 settled in the upper Midwest and northern plains and became successful farmers. The northern plains region had the highest proportion of foreign-born residents in the nation during the last quarter of the century. These European immigrants formed homogenous ethnic enclaves that maintained the distinctive culture and traditions of their homelands. Swedish immigrants in Minnesota, for instance, spoke Swedish with one another and centered their lives around the Swedish Lutheran church; their children attended Swedish schools and learned to read the Swedish bible, sing Swedish songs, and recite Swedish history; and both men and women wore traditional Swedish dress on holidays. By the end of the century, there were also homogenous ethnic communities of Germans, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and Norwegians dotting the northern landscape.

**Gender and Western Settlement**

The Homestead Act was unusual in allowing unmarried women to make claims; between 5 percent and 15 percent
and many observers were anxious to establish a more
as well. Mining towns were known as violent places,
including Miller & Lux holdings, were exclusively male
California was up to 93 percent male, and many ranches,
including Miller & Lux holdings, were exclusively male
as well. Mining towns were known as violent places,
and many observers were anxious to establish a more
respectable family life there.

The most pronounced difference was a gender-
resembling society in mining camps and towns, which were
overwhelmingly masculine. During the Gold Rush, Cali-
forian was up to 93 percent male, and many ranches,
including Miller & Lux holdings, were exclusively male
as well. Mining towns were known as violent places,
and many observers were anxious to establish a more
respectable family life there.

Prostitutes from all over the world were drawn to
towns throughout the late 19th century, but
nowhere except in San Francisco were women systemati-
cally forced into sexual slavery. There, the situation of
Chinese laborers encouraged an exploitative world trade
in women. While by the last decades of the century, Chi-
ome merchant were allowed to bring their wives and
daughters to America, laborers had no such rights. By
custom, as well, respectable Chinese women were expected
to stay home. The numbers of Chinese women in America
remained extremely low in the 19th century, never rising
above 5,000.

The difficulty in bringing Chinese women to Amer-
ica encouraged a brutal international trade in prostitu-
tion. Chinese women who were kidnapped or purchased
from poor parents were sold into indentured servitude
or slavery and unknowingly shipped to America to
become prostitutes. In San Francisco, an estimated 85
percent to 97 percent of Chinese women were prostitu-
tes in 1860; around 72 percent in 1870; and between
21 percent to 50 percent in 1880. They faced a singularly
harsh existence. However, some women managed to
escape prostitution. Some women married men who
had saved up enough money to purchase the contracts
that bound them; Protestant missionaries worked to
rescue prostitutes, as well.

As these few examples show, settlement patterns of
the West produced—at least for a short period of time—
societies with unequal numbers of men and women, with
different results in different places. The impact of these
disparities continues to intrigue historians, who still
puzzle, for instance, over the reasons why several western
states were the first to grant woman suffrage (see chapter
21). In the realm of Western myth, one obvious legacy of
the West’s early gender arrangements is the enduring
place in American culture of the white cowboy as an icon
of rugged masculinity.

Conquest and Resistance:
American Indians in the
Trans-Mississippi West

Focus Question

How did the Indian peoples
of the trans-Mississippi West respond to white
settlement and U.S. government policies?

The westward expansion of ranching and farming after
1865 doomed the free range of the Plains Indians and the
buffalo. In the 1830s, eastern tribes had been forcibly
moved to preserves west of the Mississippi so as perma-
nently to separate whites and Indians. In scarcely a
decade, white settlers had penetrated these lands via the
overland trails to the Pacific Coast. In the 1850s, when the
Kansas and Nebraska territories opened to white settle-
ment, the government forced a dozen tribes living there
to cede 15 million acres, leaving them on reservations
totaling less than 1.5 million acres. Thus began what histo-
rian Philip Weeks has called the “policy of concentration”:
No longer were Indians to be pushed west onto the arid
plains that early white explorers had christened The Great
American Desert. Rather, as white settlers moved onto
and through the plains and mountains, they began to
covet these large spaces, which earlier treaties had
assigned to the Indians for “as long as waters shall run and
the grass shall grow.”

Even before the Civil War, the nomadic Plains Indi-
ans, whose culture and economy were based on the buff-
alo, faced pressure not only from the advancing tide of
white settlement but also from the forced migration of
eastern tribes into their domain. In the aftermath of the
Civil War, the process of concentrating Indian tribes on
reservations accelerated. Chiefs of the five “civilized
tribes”—Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and
Seminoles—had signed treaties of alliance with the Con-
federacy. At that time, they were living in Indian Territory
(most of present-day Oklahoma), where their economy
was linked to the South. Many of them, especially mem-
bers of the mixed-blood upper class, were slaveholders.
Bitter toward the United States, the tribal leaders cast their
lot with the Confederacy on the principle that “the enemy
of my enemy is my friend.” The Cherokee leader Stand
Watie rose to brigadier general in the Confederate army
and was the last Confederate commander to surrender, on
June 23, 1865.

Siding with the Confederacy proved to be a costly
mistake for these tribes. The U.S. government “recon-
structed” Indian Territory more quickly and with less
contention than it reconstructed the former Confederate
states. Treaties with the five tribes in 1866 required them to grant tribal citizenship to their freed slaves and reduced tribal lands by half. The government then settled Indians who had been dispossessed from other areas on the land it had taken from these tribes.

Conflict with the Sioux

The Civil War had set in motion a generation of Indian warfare that was more violent and widespread than anything since the 17th century. During the war, the Union army was forced to pull many units out of frontier posts to fight the Confederacy. Moreover, the drain on the Union treasury to finance the war compounded the usual corruption of Indian agents and delayed annuity payments to tribes that had sold their land to the government.

These events had dire consequences on the northern plains.

Herdèd onto reservations along the Minnesota River by the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1851, the Santee Sioux were angry when late annuity payments in summer 1862 threatened starvation. Warriors began to speak openly of reclaiming ancestral hunting grounds. Then on August 17, a robbery in which five white settlers were murdered seemed to open the floodgates. The warriors persuaded Chief Little Crow to take them on the warpath, and over the next few weeks, at least 500 white Minnesotans were massacred.

Hastily mobilized militia and army units finally suppressed the uprising. A military court convicted 319 Indians of murder and atrocities and sentenced 303 of them to death. Appalled by this ferocious retaliation, Lincoln
personally reviewed the trial transcripts and reduced the number of executions to 38—the largest act of executive clemency in American history. Even so, the hanging of 38 Sioux on December 26, 1862, was the largest mass execution the country has ever witnessed. The government evicted the remaining Sioux from Minnesota to Dakota Territory.

In the meantime, the army’s pursuit of fleeing Santee Sioux provoked other Sioux tribes farther west. By 1864, and for a decade afterward, fighting flared between the army and the Sioux across the northern plains. It reached a climax in 1874 and 1875 after gold-seekers poured into the Black Hills of western Dakota, a sacred place to the Sioux. At the battle of Little Bighorn in Montana Territory on June 25, 1876, Sioux warriors led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, along with their Cheyenne allies, wiped out George A. Custer and the 225 men with him in the Seventh Cavalry. In retaliation, General Philip Sheridan carried out a winter campaign in which the Sioux and Cheyenne were crushed.

Largest and most warlike of the Plains tribes, the Sioux were confined to a reservation in Dakota Territory where poverty, disease, apathy, and alcoholism reduced this once-proud people to desperation.

**Suppression of Other Plains Indians**

Just as the Sioux uprising in Minnesota had triggered war on the northern plains in 1862, a massacre of Cheyennes in Colorado in 1864 sparked a decade of conflict on the southern plains. The discovery of gold near Pike’s Peak set off a rush to Colorado in 1858–59. The government responded by calling several Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs to a council, and with a combination of threats and promises, the agents persuaded the chiefs to sign a treaty giving up all claims to land in this region (guaranteed by an earlier treaty of 1851) in exchange for a reservation at Sand Creek in southeast Colorado.

In 1864, hunger and resentment on the reservation prompted many warriors to return to their old hunting grounds and to raid white settlements. Skirmishes soon erupted into open warfare. In the fall, Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle, believing that he had concluded peace with the Colorado settlers, returned to the reservation. There, at dawn on November 29, militia commanded by Colonel John Chivington surrounded and attacked Black Kettle’s unsuspecting camp, killing 200 Indians, half of them women and children.

The notorious Sand Creek massacre set a pattern for several similar attacks on Indian villages in subsequent years. Ever since the earliest battles between colonists and Indians in the 17th century, whites had followed the strategy of burning Indian crops and villages as a means of destroying or driving off the Indians. Sherman and Sheridan had adopted a similar strategy against the Confederates and followed it again as military commanders responsible for subduing the Plains Indians. Their purpose was to corral all of the Indians onto the reservations that were being created throughout the West. In addition to trying to defeat the Indians in battle, which proved to be difficult against the mounted Plains Indians, the army encouraged the extermination of the buffalo herds. Professional hunters slaughtered the large, clumsy animals by the millions for their hides, thus depriving Plains Indians of both physical and spiritual sustenance. When the buffalo became nearly extinct in 1883, the Plains Indians understood that their old way of life was gone forever. “Nothing happened after that,” recalled one Crow warrior. “We just lived. There were no more war parties, no capturing horses from the Piegan and the Sioux, no buffalo to hunt. There is nothing more to tell.”

The Indians were left with no alternative but to come into the reservations, and by the 1880s, nearly all of them had done so. Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé pronounced the epitaph for their way of life when federal troops blocked the escape of his band from Montana to Canada in 1877:

> I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. The old men are all dead. It is cold and we have no blankets . . . no food . . . The little children are freezing to death . . . Hear me, my chiefs; I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.

**The “Peace Policy”**

Many Eastern reformers condemned America’s violent repression of the Indians. The most prominent was Helen Hunt Jackson, whose 1881 book *A Century of Dishonor* was an outraged indictment of anti-Indian violence, exploitation, and broken treaties. Yet as sympathetic as Jackson was to the Indians’ plight, she was not sympathetic to Indian culture; like other white Protestant reformers of her day, she believed that Indians must be stripped of their culture in order to assimilate productively to American society.

In this view she was in alignment with the government: in 1869, President Grant had announced a new “peace policy” toward Indians, urging “their civilization and ultimate citizenship.” “Civilization” meant acceptance of white culture, including the English language, Christianity, and individual ownership of property. It also meant allegiance to the United States rather than to a tribe. In 1869, Grant established a Board of Indian Commissioners and staffed it with humanitarian reformers. In 1871, the century-long policy of negotiating treaties with
Indian “nations” came to an end. From then on, Indians became “wards of the nation,” to be civilized and prepared for citizenship, first on reservations and eventually on individually owned parcels of land that were carved out of the reservations. Most Indians acquiesced in the “reconstruction” that offered them citizenship by the 1880s; they had little choice.

The Dawes Severalty Act and Indian Boarding Schools

In order to further the goal of Indian ownership of private property, Protestant reformers in the 1880s found themselves in a strange alliance with land-hungry westerners, who greedily eyed the 155 million acres of land tied up in reservations. If part of that land could be allotted directly to individual ownership by Indian families, the remainder would become available for purchase by whites. The 1887 Dawes Severalty Act combined these impulses toward greed and reform. This landmark legislation called for the dissolution of Indian tribes as legal entities, offered Indians the opportunity to become citizens, and allotted each head of family 160 acres of farmland or 320 acres of grazing land as long as they were “severed” from their tribe.

For whites who were eager to seize reservation land, the Dawes Act brought a bonanza. At noon on April 22, 1889, the government threw open specified parts of the Indian Territory to “Boomers,” who descended on the region like locusts and by nightfall had staked claim to nearly 2 million acres. Indians did not just lose the lands legally opened for white settlement: many Indians who received individual land titles through the Dawes Act also lost these lands to unscrupulous whites through fraud and misrepresentation. Eventually, whites gained title to 108 million acres of former reservation land.

For Indians, the Dawes Severalty Act was a disaster. Private ownership of land was an alien concept to most tribes, yet Indians received little training for a transition to farming, much less appropriate tools or supplies. Moreover, the poor quality of their land allotments made farming difficult, if not impossible. In addition the Dawes Act directly attacked Indian culture by forbidding Indian religions, the telling of Indian myths and legends, and the practices of medicine men.

Indian boarding schools established beginning in the late 1870s were another attempt to strip Indians of their culture. Children were taken from their families to the Hampton Institute in Virginia and the Carlisle Institute in Pennsylvania, among other schools. There they were forbidden to speak Indian languages or wear Indian clothing; as one 1890 set of instructions from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs put it, “Pupils must be compelled to converse with each other in English, and should be properly rebuked or punished for persistent violation of this rule.” The writer Zitkala-Sa, a Yankton Sioux, later remembered her life in an Indian school: “the melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by.”

Indian schools may have had assimilation to white culture as a goal, but they also had a very narrow vision of the place Indians would hold in a white world. Girls were taught domestic science but little more and were educated for menial jobs as servants; many spent long hours working in school laundries as virtual servants of the schools that were supposed to teach them. Students resisted as best they could by running away, often only to be caught and returned to school again; many adults later resisted the training they had received by returning to Indian traditions. This was the case with Zitkala-Sa: after graduation from an Indian boarding school, Zitkala-Sa taught at the Carlisle School and became a much-praised writer in New York. But later she would undergo a spiritual crisis: she compared herself to a “slender tree” that had been “uprooted from my mother, nature, and God,” and lamented that she had “forgotten the healing in trees and brooks.” Eventually she left New York, married a Sioux, and became an activist for Native American rights.

The Ghost Dance

At a time of despair for many Indians, a new visionary religious movement swept through Indian peoples in 1890, offering a different kind of resistance to white domination. The Ghost Dance began with the visions of the Paiute shaman Wovoka, who counseled Indians that if they gave up alcohol, lived a simple life, and devoted themselves to prayer, white men would disappear from the earth, Indian lands would be restored, and dead Indians would rejoin the living. This message of hope was embodied in the Ghost Dance ritual, involving days of worship expressed in part through dance.

When the Ghost Dance religion spread to those Sioux led by Sitting Bull and they began days of ecstatic dancing, Indian agents grew alarmed: as one agent telegraphed authorities, “Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. We need protection and we need it now.” The results of the ensuing confrontations between Indians and authorities were tragic: first Sitting Bull and his grandson were killed in a skirmish with reservation authorities; then a few days later, a trigger-happy military—members of the Seventh Cavalry, Custer’s old regiment—opened fire on Sioux men, women, and children at Wounded Knee in the
Pine Ridge Reservation, killing 146 Indians, including 44 women and 18 children, as well as 25 soldiers. For many, the massacre at Wounded Knee symbolized the death of 19th-century Plains Indian culture. While Indians throughout the West would adapt to a new world with great resilience, working to preserve their cultural practices, there was no question that their old world had been demolished.
Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill:
Popular Myths of the West

Only a few years before he was killed, Sitting Bull had been one of the chief attractions in the entertainment extravaganza known as Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show. No mere victim of white exploitation, Sitting Bull had been a canny negotiator of fees for his appearances in 1885; he required an interpreter, several attendants, and a salary that came to half the annual salary of the typical Indian agent. He also used press interviews while on the Wild West tour to ask the U.S. government to live up to its promises to Indians. If Sitting Bull was being used by Cody, he was certainly using Cody right back.

Having “real” Indians in his show was of vital importance to Cody, who capitalized on the public’s hunger for “authentic” spectacular entertainments in his popular Wild West shows. Cody was an extraordinary mix of the new industrializing West, the frontier West, and an emerging culture of mass entertainment. Having begun his career as a soldier in the Civil War, Cody then worked for one of the transcontinental railroad lines (where he gained the nickname “Buffalo Bill” for slaughtering buffalo) before becoming a scout for the Fifth Cavalry. When Cody became the subject of a popular dime Western novel, the most improbable turn in Cody’s career occurred: he decided to dramatize his own life in a series of theatrical entertainments. By the year Sitting Bull joined Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show with its band of trick riders and sharpshooters, it required 18 railroad cars to transport performers (including a number of Indians), work crews, animals, and equipment.

The Wild West Show celebrated the white conquest of the West in a series of acts called “The Drama of
Industrialization and the New South

Focus Question How did industrialization shape African American experience in the post-Reconstruction South?

Like the West, the South underwent a surge of industrialization in the last decades of the 19th century. Boosters like the energetic and influential Henry Grady, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, proclaimed that a New South had emerged, one hospitable to industry and to Northern investment.

Some people scoffed at such promotional talk in a world that was still decidedly rural, but in fact the pace of industrialization quickened in the last decades of the century, with textiles leading the way. In 1880, the South had only 5 percent of the country's textile-producing capacity; by 1900, it had 23 percent and was well on its way to surpassing New England a generation later. Tobacco also industrialized, with James B. Duke of North Carolina transforming the industry with his installation of cigarette-making machines at Durham in 1885. In 1890, he created the American Tobacco Company, which controlled 90 percent of the market.

Railroads and iron also saw a surge in growth. Between 1877 and 1900, the South built railroads faster than any other region in the country. In 1880, the former slave states produced only 9 percent of the nation's pig iron; by 1890, after a decade of extraordinary expansion for the industry nationwide, that proportion had doubled. Most of the growth was concentrated in northern Alabama, where the proximity of coal, limestone, and ore made the new city of Birmingham the “Pittsburgh of the South.”

But there were limits to Southern industrialization. It was difficult to catch up with well-established Northern industries. Thus Southerners competed in the few areas in which they could find markets for local crops and resources: textiles produced from their own cotton; cigarettes manufactured from Southern tobacco; as well as lumber, sugar, and iron.

Not all of the wealth from the new industries went into the pockets of Southerners, though. Over the late 19th century, Southern industry attracted more and more Northern capital in a pattern that held true across industries. At first, for instance, Southerners supplied most of the capital in the expansion of the textile industry. But after 1893, an increasing amount came from the North, as New England mill owners began to recognize the benefits of relocating to the low-wage, nonunion South. In the tobacco industry, too, initial Southern capital gave way to Northern financing, especially after James Duke moved to New York in the 1880s. But most dependent on Northern capital were the railroads and iron industries. When in 1886 Southern railroads switched their tracks from the regional gauge to the national standard, the symbolic domination of the North seemed complete.

Heavy Northern investment in Southern industry meant that the South had less control over economic decisions that affected its welfare. Some historians have referred to the South’s “colonial” relationship to the North in the late 19th century. One result was that the low wages prevailing in the South made for inequitable distribution of the economic benefits of industrial growth. Average Southern per capita income remained only two-fifths of the average in the rest of the country well into the 20th century.

Race and Industrialization

Even those low wages were unequally distributed, as the politics of race influenced the structuring of industrial jobs. Along the piedmont from Virginia to Alabama, new cotton mills sprang up for a white labor force drawn from farm families on the worn-out red clay soil of this region. About 40 percent of the workers were women, and 25 percent were children aged 16 and younger. Living in company towns, they labored long hours for wages about half the level prevailing in New England’s mills, with their cheap labor giving mill owners a competitive advantage.

At first many African Americans confidently assumed that there would be jobs for them in this new textile industry. And why not? Blacks had worked before the Civil War in mills, and they continued to work in tobacco factories in the postwar era, albeit in the lowest-paid jobs and performing the dirtiest work. There seemed no reason why such a large and inexpensive workforce might not become a mainstay of the mills.

But industrialization did not mean progress for blacks in most places. Instead, it went hand in hand with segregation in the increasingly white supremacist world of the 1880s and 1890s. To attract white workers, mill owners promised them segregated environments. The bargain offered was this: mill workers might not earn very much, but they would gain what one historian has called the “wages of whiteness,” a sense of racial superiority that could serve as compensation for their low economic status. Thus the New South was built around the politics of the people.”
of race, and many African Americans lost ground in the emerging industrial economy. For most African Americans, agricultural work was thus the only option.

Southern Agriculture

A major success story, however, was increasing black ownership of land in the post-Reconstruction period, with almost 200,000 farmers achieving that cherished goal. Most black landowners in the South were in the Upper South or coastal areas; others were in the trans-Mississippi West.

Still, most blacks were tenants rather than landowners, and many blacks and whites faced lives of grinding rural poverty. Those who owned land risked sliding into tenancy; those who did not own land found it impossible to make the leap to land ownership. One-crop specialization, overproduction, declining prices, and an exploitative credit system all contributed to the problem. The basic institution of the Southern rural economy was the crop lien system, which came into being because of the shortage of money and credit in the war-ravaged South. Few banks had survived the war, and land values had plummeted, which left farmers unable to secure a bank loan with their land as collateral. Instead, merchants in the crossroads country stores that sprang up across the South provided farmers with supplies and groceries in return for a lien on their next crop.

This system might have worked well if the merchants had charged reasonable interest rates and if cotton and tobacco prices had remained high enough for the farmer to pay off his debts after harvest with a little left over. But the country storekeeper charged a credit price 50 or 60 percent above the cash price, partly because he had no competition and partly because of the high risk of loss on his loans. And crop prices, especially for cotton, were dropping steadily. Cotton prices declined from an average of 12 cents per pound in the 1870s to 6 cents in the 1890s. As prices fell, many farmers went deeper and deeper into debt to the merchants. Sharecroppers and tenants incurred a double indebtedness: to the landowner whose land they sharecropped or rented, and to the merchant who furnished them supplies on credit. Because many landowners became merchants, and vice versa, that indebtedness was often to the same man.

One reason cotton prices fell was overproduction. Britain had encouraged the expansion of cotton growing in Egypt and India during the Civil War to make up for the loss of American cotton. After the war, Southern growers had to face international competition. By 1878, the Southern crop had reached the output of the best antebellum year, and during the next 20 years, output doubled. This overproduction drove prices ever lower. To obtain credit, farmers had to plant every acre with the most marketable cash crop—cotton. This practice exhausted the soil and required ever-increasing amounts of expensive fertilizer, which fed the cycle of overproduction and declining prices.

It also reduced the amount of land that could be used to grow food crops. Farmers who might otherwise have produced their own cornmeal and raised their own hogs for bacon became dependent on merchants for these supplies. Before the Civil War, the cotton states had been nearly self-sufficient in food; by the 1890s, they had to import nearly half their food at a price 50 percent higher than it would have cost to grow their own. Many Southerners recognized that only diversification could break this dependency, but the crop lien system locked them into it. “We ought to plant less [cotton and tobacco] and more of grain and grasses,” said a North Carolina farmer in 1887, “but how are we to do it; the man who furnishes us rations at 50 percent interest won’t let us; he wants money crop planted....It is cotton! cotton! cotton! Buy everything and make cotton pay for it.” Many sharecroppers, particularly blacks, fell into virtual peonage.

Exodusters and Emigrationists

Given the multiple difficulties rural African Americans faced—from persistent poverty to dependence on white owners to racial discrimination and violence—it is not surprising that many dreamed of leaving the South entirely. In the late 1870s, a movement called Exodus gained momentum among African Americans who believed that they might have to “repeat the history of the Israelites” and “seek new homes beyond the reign and rule of Pharaoh.” Most pinned their hopes on internal emigration to the West, although some explored the possibility of emigration to Liberia as well. In 1875, Benjamin Singleton, a former Tennessee slave, helped a group of African Americans establish a new life in an agrarian colony in western Kansas; three years later, he circulated an alluring advertisement picturing prairie abundance in the hopes of enticing a few hundred more settlers. Instead, in the spring of 1879, some 20,000 African Americans began an exodus to Kansas from all over the Southwest—drawn not just by the advertisement but also by rumors that there was free land available for settlers as well as free supplies from the government. The rumors were false, but many of these Exodusters stayed on in Kansas anyway, although not as homesteaders amidst the prairie abundance but as domestics and laborers in Kansan towns, including towns they founded such as Nicodemus.

Race Relations in the New South

The desire to emigrate for better jobs, autonomy, and a place where African Americans could be truly free did not end with the Exodusters. “The disposition among the colored people to migrate now is strong, and is increasing,”

Copyright 2008 Thomson Learning, Inc. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part.
commented a white Southerner in 1889. There was a net loss of 537,000 African Americans in the South between 1880 and 1910. Economic reasons were important, but so too was the worsening world of white supremacy that arose in that period.

Adherence to the industrial ideology behind the New South, with its emphasis on racial cooperation, was shallow at best among broad classes of whites. Instead, many refused to let go of the legacy of the defeated plantation South. They celebrated the Lost Cause by organizing fraternal and sororal organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). The UDC, like the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) on which it was modeled, was open only to whites who could prove their relation to the “first families” of the South. Its members decorated the graves of Confederate soldiers, funded public statues of Confederate heroes, and sought to preserve a romanticized history of the slavery era. Several white Southern authors became famous writing stories about this fabled South. Thomas Nelson Page’s racist sentimental story “Marse Chan” created a national craze for Southern literature in the 1880s. Published in a Northern magazine, the story was written in what Page claimed to be authentic black dialect, with an aging freedman telling of the glorious days before the war when slaves supposedly had little work to do. Such stories romanticized the Southern plantation, cleansing it of the horrors of slavery.

The national appeal of such stories made it clear that anti-black racism was not just a Southern phenomenon. Certainly, there was shockingly little Northern reaction to the wave of lynchings of black men in the South in the 1890s. Lynchings rose to an all-time high, averaging 188 per year, while the viciousness of racist propaganda reached an all-time low. At a time when many professional middle-class African American men and women were steadily gaining economically, even as a downward spiral in the rural economy frustrated whites, lynchings of black men were not just extraordinarily violent acts. They were also clear symbolic messages to entire black communities to keep their “place” in a white-dominated society. Ritualized expressions of white power, lynchings were not secret or furtive events, but often well-orchestrated community affairs advertised in advance and sometimes even including men, women, and children as spectators.

In 1892, three respected African American businessmen who owned a grocery store in Memphis, Tennessee, were taken from the jail where they awaited trial and lynched by a white mob. Their ostensible crime was attempted murder—firing on three white intruders who had burst into their store—but their real offense was successfully challenging the dominance of a white grocery store in their area.

In response to the lynching, the African American journalist Ida B. Wells embarked on an extensive anti-lynching campaign involving an economic boycott as well as a series of fiery editorials in her newspaper, Free Speech, that called into question the usual white rationale for lynching: the supposed rape or molestation of a white woman. Correctly exposing this common trumped-up charge as “the old racket,” Wells ignited the wrath of white Memphis residents and was forced to flee for her life to the North. But there her anti-lynching campaign met with indifference from Northerners until Wells traveled to England on a speaking tour. She received widespread publicity as she called into question how civilized America could be if it tolerated a barbaric practice like lynching; she also touched a nerve back home. Upper-class white Northerners indifferent to the murder of blacks but sensitive to English opinion finally sat up and began to notice her campaign. Her English travels were a brilliant strategy to shake up Northern complacency and challenge Northern complicity in lynching.

The Emergence of an African American Middle Class

Wells was part of an extensive African American middle class that came of age in the 1880s and 1890s. These men and women, educated in the emerging black colleges, became teachers, doctors, lawyers, ministers, and business owners. They formed numerous civic organizations, such as the 1896 National Association of Colored Women, which was part of the women’s club movement of the late 19th century (see chapter 19). Echoing the moral reform activities of white middle-class women, its president, Mary Church Terrell, called on middle-class black women to work with “the masses of our women” and to “uplift and claim them.”

Such institution building, combined with increasing prosperity, gave middle-class blacks great optimism that “racial uplift” might reduce or even eliminate racism in American society. “We as a race are enjoying the brightest rays of Christian civilization,” wrote one bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Middle-class blacks believed that through education and self-improvement, they could become “best men” and “best women,” seen as equals by middle-class whites. These were not naïve hopes, as black entry into the middle class surged in the 1880s and early 1890s.

The Rise of Jim Crow

But these visible successes of middle-class African Americans enraged white supremacists, who denied any possibility of class solidarity across racial lines. Serious anti-black riots broke out in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898 and in Atlanta in 1906. Several states adopted new constitutions
CHAPTER 18: A Transformed Nation: The West and the New South, 1865–1900

that disenfranchised most black voters by means of literacy or property qualifications (or both), poll taxes, and other clauses implicitly aimed at black voters. The new constitutions contained “understanding clauses” or “grandfather clauses” that enabled registrars to register white voters who were unable to meet the new requirements. In Williams v. Mississippi (1898), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld these disenfranchisement clauses on the grounds that they did not discriminate “on their face” against blacks. Most blacks lost the right to vote, and the Republican Party almost disappeared from most southern states. State Democratic parties then established primary elections in which only whites could vote. For the next 60 years, the primary was the only meaningful election in the South.

During these same years, most southern states passed Jim Crow laws (the name came from blackface minstrelsy; see chapter 10) mandating racial segregation in public facilities of all kinds. Many African Americans resisted: in 1884, Ida B. Wells, at the time a young schoolteacher, refused to give up her seat in a railway “ladies’ car.” The conductor “tried to drag me out of the seat,” she remembered, “but the moment he caught hold of my arm I fastened my teeth in the back of his hand. I had braced my feet against the seat in front and was holding to the back, and as he had already been badly bitten he didn’t try it again by himself. He went forward and got the baggage-man and another man to help him and of course they succeeded in dragging me out.” Wells sued the railroad, winning her case in a lower court before losing it on appeal.

In 1896 came a tremendous setback for American equality. In the landmark case of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the Supreme Court sanctioned Jim Crow laws so long as the separate facilities for blacks were equal to those for whites—which, in practice, they never were. At this “nadir” of the black experience in freedom, as one historian has called the 1890s, a new black leader emerged as successor of the abolitionists and Reconstruction politicians who were fading from the scene. Booker T. Washington, a 39-year-old educator who had founded Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, gave a speech at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition that made him famous—and has been controversial ever since.

Speaking to a white audience at this celebration of Southern industry and progress, Washington was introduced as “a representative of Negro enterprise and civilization.” Assuring his audience that he wanted to “cement the friendship of the races,” Washington talked of the “new era of industrial progress” and told the industrialists before him that they should hire African Americans rather than immigrants. “Cast down your bucket where you are,” he told them, “among the eight million of Negroes whose habits you know.” If they did so, Washington said, they would not only find people to “run your factories,” but could also be assured that they would be surrounded by a “faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful” people. In the most famous sentence of the speech, Washington then promised that “in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” In effect, Washington accepted segregation as a temporary accommodation between the races in return for white support of black efforts for education, social uplift, and economic progress.

It was a complex, canny speech, much like the man himself, and Washington’s listeners came away with very different impressions. Many African Americans applauded his appeal for black inclusion in the new industrial order; many white audience members simply took away the idea that Washington approved of segregation, vocational training for blacks, and a permanent, second-class status. An eloquent response to Washington came from the emerging African American leader W. E. B. Du Bois in his 1903 masterpiece, The Souls of Black Folk, a set of essays written between 1897 and 1903. Criticizing Washington...
for a policy of conciliation and submission, Du Bois reminded his audience that "only a firm adherence to their higher ideals and aspirations will ever keep those ideals within the realm of possibility."

The Politics of Stalemate

**Focus Question** Why did politicians fail to address many of the most serious economic and social issues facing the nation in the post-Reconstruction world?

During the 20 years between the Panic of 1873 and the Panic of 1893, serious economic and social issues beset the American polity. As described in the next chapter, the strains of rapid industrialization, an inadequate monetary system, agricultural distress, and labor protest built up to potentially explosive force. The two mainstream political parties, however, seemed indifferent to these problems. Paralysis gripped the national government as the Civil War continued to cast its shadow, preventing political leaders from grappling with new issues facing the country because they remained mired in the passionate partisanship of the past.

The Republican Party did not disappear from the South after 1877. Nor was the black vote immediately and totally suppressed. Republican presidential candidates won about 40 percent of the votes in former slave states throughout the 1880s, and some blacks continued to win elections to state legislatures until the 1890s. Until 1901, every U.S. Congress but one had at least one black representative from the South. Independent parties occasionally formed coalitions with Republicans to win local or state elections, especially in Virginia.

Even so, “bulldozing” of black voters (chapter 17) continued to keep the southern states solid for the Democrats. In 1880, the Democratic Party hoped to build on this foundation to win the presidency for the first time in a generation. Taking their cue from the Republicans, the Democrats nominated a Civil War hero, General Winfield Scott Hancock. His opponent was another Civil War general, James A. Garfield, who had served in Congress since the war. In an election with the closest popular vote in American history (Garfield had a plurality of only 10,000 votes out of 9 million cast), Hancock carried every southern state, while Garfield won all but three northern states—and the election.

**Knife-Edge Electoral Balance**

The five presidential elections from 1876 through 1892, taken together, were the most closely contested elections in American history. No more than 1 percent separated the popular vote of the two major candidates in any of these contests except 1892, when the margin was 3 percent. The Democratic candidate won twice (Grover Cleveland in 1884 and 1892), and in two other elections carried a tiny plurality of popular votes (Tilden in 1876 and Cleveland in 1888) but lost narrowly in the Electoral College. During the 20 years covered by these five administrations, the Democrats controlled the House of Representatives in seven Congresses to the Republicans’ three, while the Republicans controlled the Senate in eight Congresses to the Democrats’ two. During only 6 of those 20 years did the same party control the presidency and both houses, and then by razor-thin margins.

The few pieces of major legislation during these years—the Pendleton Civil Service Act of 1883, the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, and the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890—could be enacted only by bipartisan majorities, and only after they had been watered down by numerous compromises. Politicians often debated the tariff, but the tariff laws they passed had little real impact on the economy. Tariffs were still the principal source of federal tax revenue, but because the federal budget amounted to less than 3 percent of the gross national product (compared with 20 percent today), federal fiscal policies played only a marginal role in the economy.

Divided government and the even balance between the two major parties accounted for the political stalemate. Neither party had the power to enact a bold legislative program; both parties avoided taking firm stands on controversial issues. Both parties practiced the politics of the past rather than the politics of the present. Individuals voted Republican or Democratic in the 1880s because they or their fathers had done so during the passionate years of the 1860s. Every Republican president from 1869 to 1901 had fought in the Union army; the one Democratic president, Grover Cleveland, had not. At election time, Republican candidates “waved the bloody shirt” to keep alive the memory of the Civil War. They castigated Democrats as former rebels or Copperheads who could not be trusted with the nation’s destiny. Democrats, in turn, especially in the South, denounced racial equality and branded Republicans as the party of “Negro rule”—a charge that took on added intensity in 1890 when Republicans tried (and failed by one vote in the Senate) to enact a federal elections law to protect the voting rights of African Americans. From 1876 almost into the 20th century, scarcely anyone but a Confederate veteran could be elected governor or senator in the South.

Availability rather than ability or a strong stand on issues became the prime requisite for presidential and vice presidential nominees. Geographical availability was particularly important. The solid Democratic South and the rather less solid Republican North gave each party a firm
bloc of electoral votes in every election. But in three large northern states—New York, Ohio, and Indiana—the two parties were so closely balanced that the shift of a few thousand votes would determine the margin of victory for one or the other party in the state’s electoral votes. These three states alone represented 74 electoral votes, fully one-third of the total necessary for victory. The party that carried New York (36 electoral votes) and either of the other two won the presidency. It is not surprising that of 20 nominees for president and vice president by the two parties in five elections, 16 were from these three states. Only once did each party nominate a presidential candidate from outside these three states: Democrat Winfield Scott Hancock of Pennsylvania in 1880 and Republican James G. Blaine of Maine in 1884—both lost.

Civil Service Reform

The most salient issue of national politics in the early 1880s was civil service reform. Old-guard factions in both parties opposed it. Republicans split into three factions known in the colorful parlance of the time as Mugwumps (the reformers), Stalwarts (who opposed reform), and Half-Breeds (who supported halfway reforms). Mugwumps and Half-Breeds combined to nominate James A. Garfield for president in 1880. Stalwarts received a consolation prize with the nomination of Chester A. Arthur for vice president. Four months after Garfield took office, a man named Charles Guiteau approached the president at the railroad station in Washington and shot him. Garfield lingered for two months before dying on September 19, 1881.

Described by psychiatrists as a paranoid schizophrenic, Guiteau was viewed by the public as a symbol of the spoils system at its worst. He had been a government clerk and a supporter of the Stalwart faction of the Republican Party but had lost his job under the new administration. As he shot Garfield, he shouted, “I am a Stalwart and Arthur is president now!” This tragedy gave a final impetus to civil service reform. If the spoils system could cause the assassination of a president, it was time to get rid of it.

Although a Stalwart, President Arthur supported reform. In 1883, Congress passed the Pendleton Act, which established a category of civil service jobs that were to be filled by competitive examinations. At first, only one-tenth of government positions fell within that category, but a succession of presidential orders gradually expanded the list to about half by 1897. State and local governments began to emulate federal civil service reform in the 1880s and 1890s.

Like the other vice presidents who had succeeded presidents who died in office (John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, and Andrew Johnson), Arthur failed to achieve nomination for

The man that assassinated Abraham Lincoln was a Democrat. . . . Every man that raised blood-hounds to pursue human beings was a Democrat. . . . Soldiers, every scar you have got on your heroic bodies was given to you by a Democrat.

1. Why did Ingersoll invoke the issues of the Civil War during an election that took place more than a decade after that war had ended?

For additional sources related to this feature, visit the Liberty, Equality, Power Web site at:

http://www.thomsonedu.com/history/murrin
The voters reacted convincingly—and negatively. They handed the Republicans a decisive defeat in midterm congressional elections, converting a House Republican majority of 6 to a Democratic majority of 147, and a Senate Republican majority of eight to a Democratic majority of six. Nominated for a third time in 1892, Cleveland built on this momentum to win the presidency by the largest margin in 20 years, but this outcome was deceptive. On March 4, 1893, when Cleveland took the oath of office for the second time, he stood atop a social and economic volcano that would soon erupt. When the ashes settled and the lava cooled, the political landscape would be forever altered.

The Tariff Issue

Ignoring a rising tide of farmer and labor discontent, Cleveland decided to make or break his presidency on the tariff issue. He devoted his annual State of the Union message in December 1887 entirely to the tariff, maintaining that lower duties would help all Americans by reducing the cost of consumer goods and by expanding American exports through reciprocal agreements with other nations. Republicans responded that low tariffs would flood the country with products from low-wage industries abroad, forcing American factories to close and throwing American workers out on the streets. The following year, the Republican nominee for president, Benjamin Harrison, pledged to retain the protective tariff. To reduce the budget surplus that had built up during the 1880s, the Republicans also promised more generous pensions for Union veterans.

The voters’ response was ambiguous. Cleveland’s popular-vote plurality actually increased from 29,000 in 1884 to 90,000 in 1888 (out of more than 10 million votes cast). Even so, a shift of six-tenths of 1 percent put New York in the Republican column and Harrison in the White House. Republicans also gained control of both houses of Congress. They promptly made good on their campaign pledges by passing legislation that almost doubled Union pensions and by enacting the McKinley Tariff of 1890. Named for Congressman William McKinley of Ohio, this law raised duties on a large range of products to an average of almost 50 percent, the highest since the infamous Tariff of Abominations in 1828.

The Tariff Issue

The voters’ response was ambiguous. Cleveland’s popular-vote plurality actually increased from 29,000 in 1884 to 90,000 in 1888 (out of more than 10 million votes cast). Even so, a shift of six-tenths of 1 percent put New York in the Republican column and Harrison in the White House. Republicans also gained control of both houses of Congress. They promptly made good on their campaign pledges by passing legislation that almost doubled Union pensions and by enacting the McKinley Tariff of 1890. Named for Congressman William McKinley of Ohio, this law raised duties on a large range of products to an average of almost 50 percent, the highest since the infamous Tariff of Abominations in 1828.

The voters’ response was ambiguous. Cleveland’s popular-vote plurality actually increased from 29,000 in 1884 to 90,000 in 1888 (out of more than 10 million votes cast). Even so, a shift of six-tenths of 1 percent put New York in the Republican column and Harrison in the White House. Republicans also gained control of both houses of Congress. They promptly made good on their campaign pledges by passing legislation that almost doubled Union pensions and by enacting the McKinley Tariff of 1890. Named for Congressman William McKinley of Ohio, this law raised duties on a large range of products to an average of almost 50 percent, the highest since the infamous Tariff of Abominations in 1828.

The voters’ response was ambiguous. Cleveland’s popular-vote plurality actually increased from 29,000 in 1884 to 90,000 in 1888 (out of more than 10 million votes cast). Even so, a shift of six-tenths of 1 percent put New York in the Republican column and Harrison in the White House. Republicans also gained control of both houses of Congress. They promptly made good on their campaign pledges by passing legislation that almost doubled Union pensions and by enacting the McKinley Tariff of 1890. Named for Congressman William McKinley of Ohio, this law raised duties on a large range of products to an average of almost 50 percent, the highest since the infamous Tariff of Abominations in 1828.

The voters’ response was ambiguous. Cleveland’s popular-vote plurality actually increased from 29,000 in 1884 to 90,000 in 1888 (out of more than 10 million votes cast). Even so, a shift of six-tenths of 1 percent put New York in the Republican column and Harrison in the White House. Republicans also gained control of both houses of Congress. They promptly made good on their campaign pledges by passing legislation that almost doubled Union pensions and by enacting the McKinley Tariff of 1890. Named for Congressman William McKinley of Ohio, this law raised duties on a large range of products to an average of almost 50 percent, the highest since the infamous Tariff of Abominations in 1828.

The voters’ response was ambiguous. Cleveland’s popular-vote plurality actually increased from 29,000 in 1884 to 90,000 in 1888 (out of more than 10 million votes cast). Even so, a shift of six-tenths of 1 percent put New York in the Republican column and Harrison in the White House. Republicans also gained control of both houses of Congress. They promptly made good on their campaign pledges by passing legislation that almost doubled Union pensions and by enacting the McKinley Tariff of 1890. Named for Congressman William McKinley of Ohio, this law raised duties on a large range of products to an average of almost 50 percent, the highest since the infamous Tariff of Abominations in 1828.
however, the Turner thesis is largely discredited as failing to explain the experiences of the great majority of people throughout most of American history who lived and worked in older cities and towns or on farms or plantations hundreds of miles from any frontier, and whose culture and institutions were molded more by their place of origin than by a frontier. The whole concept of a frontier as a line of white settlement beyond which lay empty land has been discredited because other peoples had lived on that land for millennia.

The Turner thesis also ignored the environmental consequences of the westward movement. The virtual destruction of the bison, the hunting almost to extinction of other forms of wildlife, the ravaging of virgin forests by indiscriminate logging, and the plowing of semi-arid grasslands on the plains drastically changed the ecological balance in the West. These ecological changes stored up trouble for the future in the form of soil erosion, dust bowls, and diminished biodiversity. Thoughtful Americans began to express concern about these problems in the 1890s, foreshadowing the launching of a conservation movement in the following decade.

The significance of the Turner thesis, however, is not whether he got everything right; in the 1890s, he expressed a widely shared belief among white Americans. They believed that liberty and equality were at least partly the product of the frontier, of the chance to go west and start a new life. And now that opportunity seemed to be ending. In fact, to many Americans it seemed that a new and worrisome power had overtaken American life, threatening American liberty: the power of the corporation.

Questions for Review and Critical Thinking

Review

1. How did the industrialization of the West affect Americans in different ways?
2. How did the Indian peoples of the trans-Mississippi West respond to white settlement and U.S. government policies?
3. How did industrialization shape African American experience in the post-Reconstruction South?
4. Why did politicians fail to address many of the most serious economic and social issues facing the nation in the post-Reconstruction world?

Critical Thinking

1. Both the South and the West industrialized in the late 19th century. What were the major differences in the industries that developed in each section, and why?
2. How were ordinary people's experiences of industrialization different in the two regions? Why? Assess the opportunities that were provided by industrialization as well as its drawbacks in the West and South.

Identities

Review your understanding of the following key terms, people, and events for this chapter (terms are defined or described in the Glossary at the end of the book).

| Homestead Act | Chinese laborers | George Hearst |
| Pacific Railroad Bill | nativism | hydraulic mining |
| Union Pacific | Chinese Exclusion Act | Western Federation of Miners (WFM) |
| Central Pacific | “golden spike” | Chisholm Trail |
| the “Big Four” of the Central Pacific | open-range grazing | “grangers” |
| | las Gorras Blancas (White caps) | Miller & Lux |
| | | vaqueros |
| | | Texas Rangers |
| | | itinerant laborers |
| | | soddies |
| | | “civilized tribes” |
| Treaty of Traverse des Sioux | | Treaty of Traverse des Sioux |
| battle of Little Bighorn | | battle of Little Bighorn |
| Sitting Bull | | Sitting Bull |
| George A. Custer | | George A. Custer |
| Sand Creek massacre | | Sand Creek massacre |
| buffalo | | buffalo |
| Helen Hunt Jackson | | Helen Hunt Jackson |
| “Peace Policy” | | “Peace Policy” |
| Dawes Severalty Act | | Dawes Severalty Act |
| Indian boarding schools | | Indian boarding schools |
| Ghost Dance | | Ghost Dance |
| Wounded Knee | Buffalo Bill Cody's wild west show | 
| | New South | sharecroppers |
| | | Exodusters |
| | | United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) |
| | | Ida B. Wells |
| | | National Association of Colored Women |
| | | Jim Crow laws |
| | | Plessy v. Ferguson |
| | | Booker T. Washington |
| | | W. E. B. Du Bois |
| | | Grover Cleveland |
| | | Mugwumps, Stalwarts, and Half-Breeds |
| | | James A. Garfield |
| | | Chester A. Arthur |
| | | McKinley Tariff of 1890 |

Suggested Readings

Nineteenth-Century Lynchings

One of the most shameful chapters in American history is the public’s acceptance of the lynchings that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most, but not all victims, were black men. Some were accused of crimes, often rape, but others merely failed to abide by the rules of what was considered proper conduct. Terror became a means of social control and regulation. A few heroic people spoke out against these atrocities. One of the leading voices for reform was Ida B. Wells. Access a link through ThomsonNOW to read about this tragic event and then answer related questions.

Visit the ThomsonNOW Web site at www.thomsonedu.com/login/ to access primary sources and answer questions related to these topics. These exercise modules allow students to e-mail their responses directly to professors from the Web site.


Chapter 17

*Chapter 18*


Chapter 19


Chapter 20


Chapter 21


Chapter 22


Chapter 23


Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31
p. 972: © Richard T. Nowitz/CORBIS; p. 977: © Richard Cummins/CORBIS; p. 980 (top): California Department of Transportation; p. 980 (bottom left): California Department of Transportation; p. 980 (bottom right): California Department of Transportation; p. 982: © Ted Streshinsky/CORBIS; p. 983: © Keren Su/CORBIS; p. 988: Lucasfilm/20th Century Fox/THE KOBAL COLLECTION; p. 990: © TM and Copyright © 20th Century Fox Film Corp. All rights reserved. / The Everett Collection; p. 993: © Rebecca Cook/Reuters/CORBIS

Chapter 32