Chapter 17

The West Transformed
1860 – 1896
Terms and People

- **vigilante** – self-appointed law keeper

- **subsidy** – grant of land or money

- **transcontinental railroad** – railroad line that spanned the continent
The frontier was the unsettled or sparsely settled area of America that was home to Native Americans. Many white settlers thought the Great Plains were empty. Railroads played a key role in settling the western U.S. Trains brought miners, ranchers, and farmers to the frontier. Trains also carried western minerals, timber, crops, and cattle to eastern markets.
The California gold rush of 1849 captured the American imagination.

Before long, miners were racing into the Sierra Nevada, the Rockies, and the Black Hills, searching for gold.
In 1859, gold and silver strikes drew over 100,000 fortune seekers to Colorado and Nevada. From 1859 to 1880, the Comstock mine in western Nevada produced some $300 million in silver and gold.

Gold fever attracted miners from around the world. **Boomtowns**, towns with sudden bursts of economic and population growth, popped up throughout the West.
After the Civil War ended, more and more prospectors rushed west. New discoveries seemed to be popping up everywhere.
With each new find, miners rushed to the site.

Others soon followed, bringing supplies and opening stores. Mining camps quickly grew from tent cities to boomtowns.
People from around the world poured into the boomtowns.

Nearly half of the miners were foreign-born, from places such as Ireland, Italy, Germany, Spain, and China.

Women, too, joined the mining boom, making money by opening restaurants and other businesses.
Many boomtowns grew so fast that they had no real government. **Vigilantes** often imposed their own form of justice.

As populations grew, some areas organized into territories subject to U.S. laws.

**U.S. Territories**
- Colorado
- Dakota
- Nevada
- Arizona
- Idaho
- Montana
The “Wild West”

Sheriffs, marshals, and judges replaced Vigilantes by 1865.

Billy the Kid

Jesse James

Butch Cassidy
Few prospectors struck it rich. **Mining underground was difficult and expensive.** Many miners eventually sold their claims to large mining companies.
Large mining companies used new methods to recover more precious metals, but in the process they *stripped hillsides of vegetation* and left rivers polluted.

By the 1890s, the mining boom was over and many mines closed because costs became too high. Once-thriving mine communities became *ghost towns*. 
The mining boom helped create a railroad boom.

Before 1860, railroad lines ended at the Mississippi River.

To encourage westward expansion, the government gave subsidies to the railroads to build new tracks.
The railroads also began work to fulfill a longtime goal—to build a **transcontinental railroad** that would stretch from coast to coast.

Two railroads won the right to build from opposite directions, eventually meeting in the middle.
It took thousands of workers and many years to complete the job.

Bad weather and the rugged terrain made work difficult and dangerous.

Laborers came from many countries around the world—including China.
The Central Pacific and Union Pacific connected their tracks at Promontory, Utah, in 1869, completing the transcontinental railroad.
Effects of the Transcontinental Railroad

- Increased settlement of the West
- Increased business activity and East-West trade
- Helped make the railroad industry one of the most powerful in the country
Populations Increase!

Several new states were soon carved from the rapidly growing region.

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<tr>
<th>City</th>
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<th>1890</th>
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<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
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<td>San Francisco</td>
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**Skillbuilder: Interpreting Charts**

Which city had the largest increase in numbers of people, 1860–1890?

*1861 Territorial Census

Sources: Population Abstract of the United States; Colorado Republic

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<td>Wyoming</td>
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Terms and People

• **tepee** – cone-shaped tent made of buffalo skins

• **reservation** – land set aside for Native Americans to live on

• **Sitting Bull** – Sioux leader who fought against white settlement of the West
By the end of the Civil War, some 360,000 Native Americans lived in the West, many on the Great Plains.

European explorers and the flood of settlers who followed had changed their lives.

Native Americans now used horses and guns, and traveled faster and farther.
Native American Life on the Plains

The Buffalo was central to the life of Plains Indian tribes. Over time, many Plains tribes developed a nomadic way of life tied to buffalo hunting. Its meat was the main food in their diet and its skins served as the covering for their shelters, called teepees. Plains women turned buffalo hides into clothing, shoes, and blankets. Buffalo chips (dried manure) were used as cooking fuel. Bones and horns became tools and bowls.

Plains hunters also hunted deer and elk and some Plains tribes tended crops of corn, beans, and squash.
Hunting on the Plains

Strength, speed, agility, and accuracy made Plains horsemen skilled hunters, highly respected in their communities.

Hunters used spears and arrows to bring down the huge beasts. Families then harvested the skin, bones, meat, and tissue, wasting little.

Artist John Mix Stanley had a keen sense that he was chronicling a vanishing way of life as he painted *Buffalo Hunt on the Southwestern Prairies* in 1845. **Interpreting Visuals** What qualities does Stanley convey about the hunters?
Romanticizing Native American Life

George Catlin made this painting of a Mandan village from sketches, rather than memory, to capture “the thrilling panorama” he saw. Even so, like most of his paintings, it is a romanticized portrait of his subject.

Recognizing Bias  Why might Catlin have painted the scene this way?
A Clash of Cultures

Native Americans were being driven from their lands by more and more white settlers and miners in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1864, some bands of Cheyenne warriors attacked miners and soldiers in southeastern Colorado.

In response, about 1,200 Colorado militia led by Colonel John Chivington opened fire on a peaceful Cheyenne village located along Sand Creek. More than 150 Native American men, women, and children were killed in what came to be known as the Sand Creek Massacre.
Broken Treaties

Most treaties made by the federal government with Native Americans promised that the land would remain theirs “as long as the grass grows or water runs.” Unfortunately, these promises would be broken.

As wagon trains heading west crossed the Great Plains in the 1850s, pioneers saw the possibilities for farming and ranching on its grasslands. Settlers pressured the federal government for more land and asked for protection from Native Americans.

In 1851, the First Treaty of Fort Laramie promised Native Americans that their lands would be protected if they settled permanently. A second treaty, signed in 1868, gave Native tribes a large reservation in the Black hills of South Dakota. In 1874, gold was discovered in the Black Hills and prospectors rushed on to Indian lands.
Native American Lands in the West, 1850–1890

MAJOR EVENTS OF THE INDIAN WARS
1. Sand Creek Massacre - 1864
2. Fetterman Massacre - 1866
3. Battle of Little Bighorn - 1876
4. Geronimo Surrenders - 1886
5. Wounded Knee Massacre - 1890

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER
Interpreting Maps
1. Location In which area of the West did most of the major battles take place?
2. Movement What was the major change that took place in the West between 1850 and 1890?
Battle of Little Bighorn

The Black Hills of Dakota Territory was sacred Indian land. President Grant yielded to pressure from gold prospectors and offered to buy the land. The Indians refused to sell.

After two years of skirmishing and a few battles, a force was sent to the Montana Territory to rout the Indians. At Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull had a huge encampment with hundreds of warriors ready to fight.
At Little Bighorn, Custer divided his regiment of 647 men into three battalions. Custer led a direct charge against an Indian encampment of over 4,000 but was stopped before he could cross the Little Bighorn River. He made a stand on a nearby ridge across from the native encampment and his unit was annihilated.

Though Custer and 264 of his men died, several of his scouts that did not and most of Reno’s and Benteen’s men escaped.
Archeologists have found the diary of General George Armstrong Custer buried on the battlefield of the Little Bighorn. What were the last five entries?
Who was responsible for the Battle of Little Bighorn?
As the Native Americans of the Plains battled to remain free, the buffalo herds that they depended upon for survival dwindled. Hired hunters killed the animals to feed workers that were building railroads. Others shot buffalo as sport or to supply eastern factories with leather for robes, shoes, and belts. From 1872 to 1882 hunters killed more one million buffalo each year.

By the 1880s, most Plains tribes had been forced on to reservations, land set aside for Native American tribes. The Dawes Act of 1887, was intended to encourage Native Americans to become farmers. The Act divided reservation land into plots for individual families. Most Native Americans were not interested in farming or lacked the tools, training, and money to be successful. Many sold their land for fraction of its real value.
A Way of Life Ends

By the end of the 1800s, Native American lands had been taken and their culture treated with contempt.

The U.S. government sent many Native American children to special boarding schools. They were taken from their homes to be taught about white culture. These attempts to “Americanize” the children did not make them part of white society.
The Carlisle Indian Industrial School was a school for assimilation in Pennsylvania. Boys and girls were taught to read, write, and learn industrial and domestic activities of white American culture. The left photo shows some Lakota boys upon their arrival at the school. **What changes do you see in them in the right photo, after they have spent some time at the school?**
Terms and People

• **open range** – unfenced land

• **cattle drive** – the herding and moving of cattle over long distances

• **vaquero** – Spanish word for cowhand, or cowboy

• **cow town** – settlement at the end of a cattle trail

• **cattle kingdom** – region dominated by the cattle industry and its ranches, trails, and cow towns
In the 1860s, railroads from Chicago and St. Louis extended into Kansas. An Illinois livestock dealer named Joseph McCoy realized that railroads could bring cattle from Texas ranches to the meat-hungry cities of the East.

McCoy’s plan turned cattle ranching into a profitable business. Cowhands started driving cattle herds north from Texas to Abilene, Kansas. From there, the beef could be shipped to Chicago and points east by rail car.

Soon other cow towns like Wichita and Dodge City began to pop up along the rail lines. The cattle drives to these towns were called long drives.
The first cowhands were called **vaqueros** and came from Mexico. They settled in the Southwest and helped Spanish and later Mexican ranchers manage their herds. **American cowhands learned to rope and ride, and adapted the saddle, spurs, lariat, and chaps from these expert horsemen.**

After Mexican-American War, Spanish-speaking southwesterners were called **Mexicanos**.

As American settlers crowded into the Southwest, the Mexicanos lost economic and political power. Many also lost their land because American courts did not recognize their ownership.
Cowhands followed specific trails across the plains. The **Chisholm Trail** stretched from San Antonio, Texas to Abilene, Kansas. From 1867 to 1884, about four million cattle were driven to market on this trial.

The cattle industry boomed for over 20 years, but the good times came to an end in 1886. First the **price of beef dropped** sharply as supply increased. Then the **open range disappeared** as farmers fenced in their lands with barbed wire. Finally, the **harsh winter of 1886-1887** killed thousands of cattle and put many ranchers out of business.
The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Industry

CATTLE INDUSTRY PEAKS

- Long drives
- Railroad lines to Kansas

CATTLE INDUSTRY FALLS

- Open range fenced in
- 1886–1887 Blizzards
Western life was a challenge. Women living on homesteads, a piece of land with a house on it, had traditional jobs such as cooking or taking in laundry. However, some women had opportunities that were not available back east. They worked as teachers and a few became sheriffs, gamblers, or even outlaws. Some women ran dance halls and boarding houses.

Western lawmakers recognized the contributions of women and gave them more legal rights than women in the east. In most territories women could own property and control their own money.

In 1869, Wyoming Territory even gave women the right to vote. By 1900, women had also won the right to vote in Colorado, Utah, and Idaho.
By the late 1800s, most Americans believed the West was a larger-than-life place where brave men and women tested themselves against all kinds of hazards. **Dime novels** exaggerated accounts of real incidents and serious works of fiction added to the myth of western life.

White settlers – miners, ranchers, farmers, cowhands, and lawmen – played heroic roles in the novels and, later, in Western movies. Native Americans were shown as villains and African Americans were not even mentioned.

The truth of the Old West was different. Native Americans and African Americans worked as cowhands and even served in the US Army. **African American troops were nicknamed “buffalo soldiers”** by Native Americans. Even the railroads that brought settlers West could not have been built without the labor of Chinese immigrants.
The Myth of the Old West
The Pony Express system was a great success and lasted many years with riders delivering mail all across the West.

The Pony Express lasted from April 3, 1860 through October 1861 - a total of 19 months. The need for the Pony Express ended with the completion of the transcontinental telegraph line. Financially, the Pony Express was a failure. The company failed to get the government mail contract. The owners invested $700,000 and lost $200,000.
Myth vs. Reality

Most of the people that settled and worked in the West after 1860 were white males like John Wayne and Clint Eastwood.

- The population of the West included over 13,000 former Mexican citizens.
- Thousands of African American freedmen migrated to the West.
- European immigrants looking to take advantage of the Homestead Act were brought to the United States by emigrant aid societies or emigration companies established by the railroads.
- By 1880, there were over 104,000 Chinese living in the West.
- One out of every three cowboys was African American, Native American, or Mexican.
Myth vs. Reality

Hundreds of men were killed in the “old west” during gunfights where both parties agreed to meet and shoot it out in the streets.

There is not a single record of a gunfight where the two participants willingly met in the street to shoot out their differences. Most gunfights occurred when one combatant surprised another. Most deaths occurred in gun battles when one person shot the other in the back or from a position where they were hiding.
Myth vs. Reality

Most of the misconceptions we have today about the West are the results of modern movies.

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show began to shape our views of the West as early as 1883. Dime store novels and Eastern vaudeville shows also influenced our perception of the real west. In 1906, *The Hold Up of the Rocky Mountain Express* became the first Western and set the standard for movies to come.
How did the myths of Western life differ from the reality of Western life?
Terms and People

- **homesteader** – settler who acquired free land from the government
- **sod** – a surface layer of earth in which the roots of grasses tangle with soil
- **sodbuster** – Plains farmer
- **sooner** – person who sneaked onto land early during the Oklahoma Land Rush
- **grange** – group of farmers who met for lectures, sewing bees, and other events
- **farm cooperative** – group of farmers who pool their money to make large purchases of tools, seed, and other supplies at a discount
- **inflation** – general rise in prices
The Homestead Act

In 1862, the federal government passed the **Homestead Act** to encourage American and immigrant families to move west. This law **offered** 160 acres of land free to anyone who agreed to live on and improve the land for five years.
The Exodusters

Who moved West? Southern farmers, Whites from the east, Former Slaves – Exodusters – who compared their movement to the Exodus of the Hebrews from enslavement in Egypt, European immigrants – Swedes, Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, and Norwegians.
Life on the Farming Frontier

Pioneers faced many challenges. The plains were nearly treeless, so **farmers were forced to build their first homes from blocks of sod**. The **sodbusters** burned corn cobs and “cow chips” for fuel and in many places were forced to dig wells more than 280 feet deep for water. **Blizzards, prairie fires, hailstorms, tornados, grasshoppers, and drought** added to the misery of life on the plains.
New Inventions Help Farmers

“Prairie Fan”
Water Pump

Steel Plow [“Sod Buster”]

Barbed Wire
Closing the Frontier

By the late 1880s, fenced-in fields had replaced open plains. The last remaining open land was Oklahoma Indian Territory. The Oklahoma land rush of 1889 symbolized the closing of the frontier. On April 22, 1889, thousands of white settlers rushed to claim two million acres of land that once belonged to Native Americans.
Farmers Organize
As prices for farm goods began to drop lower and lower, farmers had to spend more to run their farms. Railroads charged farmers high fees to carry their crops to market and also charged for the use of grain storage elevators.

In 1867, members of a group known as the Grange cooperatives that bought grain elevators and sold crops directly to merchants. This allowed farmers to keep more of their profits.

In 1890, several farm groups joined together to form a political party called the Populist Party. The Populists wanted the government increase the money supply by putting more silver into circulation. They believed that this free silver would cause prices for farm goods to go up.
Growth of the Populist Movement

The Populist movement began among struggling farmers in the Midwest, South, and West. Eventually laborers joined with farmers to press for new government policies that would benefit ordinary working people. The Populist movement reached its height in the 1890s with the formation of the Populist Party.

The Populist Movement

- Industrial Revolution mechanizes farming
- Farmers go into debt to buy equipment
- Crop production increases; prices fall
- Railroads charge excessively high rates
- Farmers organize to pressure state legislatures for railroad regulation
- Alliance movement seeks regulation of business, expansion of the money supply
- Populist Party forms to press for reforms at the national level

1896 Presidential Election

Map showing the results of the 1896 U.S. presidential election. The map indicates which states were won by McKinley (Republican) or Bryan (Democratic). The electoral vote and popular vote totals are also shown.
In 1896, farmers and labor unions joined together and demanded government help with the **falling farm prices** and the **regulation of railroad rates**. They also called for an **income tax**, an **8-hour workday**, and **limits on immigration**. At the end of 1896, the Populist Party broke up and William McKinley, a Republican, became the new President.
The Wizard of Oz and Populism?

Was *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, written by L. Frank Baum and first published in 1900, an allegory or metaphor for the political, economic and social events of America in the 1890s?

- Does Dorothy - naive, young, and simple - represent the American people?
- Is the Tornado a metaphor for a political revolution?
- Did Dorothy’s silver slippers (ruby in the 1939 film version) represent the Populist Party call for Free Silver?
- Does the "Yellow Brick Road" represent the gold standard?
- Does the Scarecrow represent Midwestern Farmers?
- Does the Tin Man represent Industrial Workers?
- Does the Cowardly Lion represent William Jennings Bryan?
- Do the Witches represent regions of the U.S.?
- What about Toto?
The Rise of Populism

In the late 1800s improvements in shipping & transportation and new farm machinery led to over-production by American farmers.

Farmers’ Problems

• Lower prices for crops
• Farmers had no cash . . . went further into debt. . . foreclosed on mortgages
• Railroads charged outrageous prices to ship crops (no regulation!)
The Rise of Populism

Farmers’ Demands

• Regulate the railroad companies! (stop them from charging such high rates)
• Make cash more available (back the dollar with silver, not gold, so dollar will be worth less)
• Political demands: single term for President and Vice-President; secret ballot; popular election of Senators
• To gain support from industrial workers: 8-hour workday; restrict immigration
The mightiest movement the world has known in two thousand years... is sending out the happiest message to oppressed humanity that the world has heard since John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness that the world’s Redeemer was coming to relieve the world’s misery.

To this sterile and remote region, infested by savage beasts and still more savage men, the women of the New England States, the women of the cultured East, came with husbands, sons and brothers to help them build up a home [in the West]... We endured hardships, and dangers; hours of loneliness, fear and sorrow... We toiled in the cabin and in the field; we helped our loved ones to make the prairie blossom...

Yet, after all our years of toil and deprivation, dangers and hardships, our homes are being taken from us by an infamous [wicked] system of mortgage foreclosure. It takes from us at the rate of five hundred a month the homes that represent the best years of our life, our toil, our hopes, our happiness. How did it happen? The government, siding with Wall Street, broke its contracts with the people... As Senator Plumb [of Kansas] tells us, “Our debts were increased, while the means to pay them [cash] was decreased.”

No more millionaires, and no more paupers; no more gold kings, silver kings and oil kings, and no more little waifs of humanity starving for a crust of bread. We shall have the golden age of which Isaiah sang and the prophets have so long foretold; when the farmers shall be prosperous and happy, dwelling under their own vine and fig tree; when the laborer shall have that for which he toils... When we shall have not a government of the people by capitalists, but a government of the people, by the people.

Source: Mary Elizabeth Lease was a popular speaker for the rights of workers and farmers. She had a powerful voice and charismatic speaking style. In this speech, Lease gave a speech to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1890, a women’s movement against alcohol.
Why did the Populist Party attract millions of supporters?

William Jennings Bryan, the “Silver-tongued Orator from Nebraska,” speaks during his 1896 presidential campaign.