

The Transformation of the Trans-Mississippi West: 1860-1900

The Struggle of the Indians

- White arrival adversely affected Indians population
- Approx. 350K Indians in West at mid-century
- Removal added Eastern tribes to the existing groups already in West
- A variety of lifestyles across the regions
 - Sioux tribal life revolved around family ties and spiritual connection to nature
 - Spiritual connection to ancestors through rituals such as Sun Dance

The Plains Indians

- Largest of Indian Groups
 - Diversity across region
 - Northern, Central, & Southern Plains
- Resistant to white settlement
- Some Nomadic – others agricultural
 - Northern Plains tribes (Lakota, Cheyenne, Crows, Blackfeet) dependent upon Bison (Buffalo)
- Society well structured but tribes failed to unite to fend off whites

The Slaughter of the Buffalo Herds

- Plains Indian life closely tied to the buffalo
- 1850→ Whites hunted buffalo to near extinction
 - Only a few thousand by 1880s
- Buffalo killed for a variety of reasons
 - Food, carriage robes, industrial belting, and other products
 - clearing rail lines and cattle pasture
 - eventually, as a strategy against Indians

Conflict With Indians

- Indians resented:
 - White settlers taking their land
 - White hunters wantonly killing buffalo
 - Proliferation of white communities in migration path of buffalo
 - Continual cheating and broken promises by whites

Government Indian Policy

- U.S. Govt. traditionally regarded tribes as independent nations
- Treaties made and usually broken
- Tribes often victimized by U.S. Agents
- Demand for western land led to pressure on govt. to take it from Indians

The Reservations

- Concentration Policy of 1850s
 - Created tribal reservations allowing govt. to move Indians from prime lands
 - Indians expected to stay on reservations - force often used
- Some peacefully adjusted or briefly opposed
 - Pueblos, Navajos, Dakota Sioux
- Others fought
 - Lakota Sioux, Cheyennes, Comanches, Nez Perces, Apache

- The Sand Creek Massacre - 1864

Relocation - 1867

- Indian Peace Commission
- All Plains tribes to be sent to either Oklahoma (Medicine Lodge Treaty) or the Dakotas (Fort Laramie Treaty)
- Board of Indian Commissioners – 1869 - responsible for reservations
 - a poor administrator - numerous conflicts between Indians & whites
 - 1871 – Congress abolished treaty making & replaced treaties with executive orders and acts of Congress

Indian Resistance 1860s - 1880s

- At first focused on wagon trains, stagecoaches, white soldiers, settlements
- 1860s - U.S. army conducted small-scale warfare against Western Indians
- 1870s – Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne raids in TX set off Red River War (1874)
 - Army troops destroy Indian supplies in winter campaign
 - Effectively ends resistance on Southern Plains
- Last tribe to maintain organized resistance - Apaches (until 1880s)

Little Big Horn

- Resistance by western Sioux who rejected Ft. Laramie Treaty leads to increased Army presence
 - Sioux led by Sitting Bull
 - US troops led by Col. George A. Custer
- Battle of Little Big Horn (1876)
 - Custer and his outnumbered troops wiped out
 - leads to greater white hostility

Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce (1877)

- ✧ Ordered to leave tribal lands in Oregon
- ✧ Joseph and followers fled rather than be forced to live in Idaho
- ✧ Army chased them down near the Canadian border
 - ✧ 200 Nez Perce dead
- ✧ Army promised to let them return home, but sent to OK instead

Chief Joseph

- I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say, "Yes" or "No." He who led the young men [Olikut] is dead. It is cold, and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are -- perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. 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.
- Surrender speech attributed to Chief Joseph

Efforts at Reform

- Lack of organization, equipment, and food doomed the Indians
- More Americans outraged by violation of Indian treaties by U.S. Govt.
- Some efforts to “save” the Indians

- Helen Hunt Jackson - *A Century of Dishonor* (1881)
- Indian Schools (1879)
 - Richard Henry Pratt – Carlisle School
 - “Kill the Indian and save the man”

The Dawes Severalty Act - 1887

- Divided tribal reservation land among families who abandoned tribal allegiances
- Intended to turn Indians into landowners and farmers
 - Full title to land after 25 years
 - Would then become citizens
- In practice - much of land not distributed to individual owners
- Nearly 1/2 of Indian land lost to white settlement

Wounded Knee - The End of Plains Indian Resistance

- Wovoka and the Ghost Dance
 - Prophecies predicted return of traditional life, buffalo herds, etc
 - Taught that followers should perform ritual Ghost Dance & wear ceremonial Ghost Shirts
- White officials alarmed by revival
 - Arrest and death of Sitting Bull
 - Suspected of rallying Sioux on reservation
- 12/29/1890 - Massacre at Wounded Knee leaves 300 Indians dead
 - Final episode of Plains resistance

Major Indian Battles in the West

Western Indian Reservations, 1890

Definition of Frontier and Reasons for Migration

- Imaginary line dividing civilization from wilderness
- Frontier moved throughout U.S. history
- Reasons for Westward migration:
 - adventure
 - economic improvement
 - greater social & political democracy

Railroads Increase Migration

- Pacific Railroad Act (1862) authorizes Transcontinental RR
 - RR's given land for each mile of track
 - Became largest landholders in West
- Union Pacific & Central Pacific meet at Promontory Point Utah in 1869
 - Immigrant labor
- 4 Additional lines completed by 1890s
- Fast & convenient means of reaching Great Plains and the Far West

Railroads Influence Settlement Patterns

- ◆ RR land sales offices in US & Europe
 - ◆ Glorified West as Garden of Eden
 - ◆ Recruiting settlers
 - ◆ Up to 20% were “girl homesteaders” – single women
 - ◆ 2.2 million foreign-born settlers in West
- ◆ RRs urged farmers to specialize crops
 - ◆ To ensure quick repayment of money owed to RRs
 - ◆ Cash crops initially bring high revenues
 - ◆ But farmers become dependent on \$ from single crop and vulnerable to market forces

Transcontinental Railroads and Federal Land Grants, 1850–1900

Key Land Legislation

- ◆ Homestead Act – 1862
 - ◆ 160 acres for \$10 – must live on & improve land for 5 years
 - ◆ 160 acres insufficient in less fertile areas west of 100th meridian
- ◆ Timber Culture Act – 1873
 - ◆ Extra 160 acres granted if trees were planted on 40 acres
 - ◆ To encourage trees for lumber & make better use of less fertile land
- ◆ Desert Land Act – 1877
 - ◆ 640 acres for \$1.25 an acre if irrigated
- ◆ Timber and Stone Act – 1878
 - ◆ Up to 160 acres of forest land at \$2.50 an acre
 - ◆ Problem with each act – speculators and big biz got most of the land

The Western Farmer

- Farmers drawn west by good soil, good transportation, and govt. land policies that offered cheap land
 - Benefited from advances in tech.
 - Windmills, barbed wire, steel plows
 - Fencing led to range wars with ranchers
 - Dependent upon intl. markets, railroads, and equipment suppliers
- Usually grew a cash crop to survive
- Had to deal with isolation, weather, drought, insects

New States & Societies

- Thriving cooperative communities develop
- New states formed
- Pioneer women get vote in western territories and states
 - Govts. hope to lure more women and families
 - Women play an important role in growth of west
 - Granting the vote recognizes contributions

The Settlement of the Trans-Mississippi West, 1860–1890

The Mormons

- Migrated to Great Salt Lake Valley – 1847
- Sought formation of independent country of Deseret
- 100K settlers in West by end of 1860s
- Strongly family oriented, politically active, economically independent
- Still dealing with conflict with non-Mormons
- Court cases by U.S. govt. sought to control Mormon religious practices
 - Including plural marriage (polygamy)
- Ultimately Mormons relent under govt. pressure
 - Utah gets statehood in 1896
 - Continue to draw new members & prosper

The Southwest & Mexican-Americans

- Mexican Americans gradually forced off lands as ranchers & settlers took control of territorial govts.
- Mexican bandits attacked TX settlements
 - Retaliation for confiscation of lands
- Throughout Southwest – Hispanic population forced by discrimination into day-labor and service oriented jobs
 - A small Mex-American elite continued
 - Many moved into urban barrios in search of economic opportunity
 - Conflict – sometimes violent – continued into 20th Century

Mining Towns

- Mineral-rich areas first to be settled
- Comstock Lode – major silver discovery - NV
 - Gold & silver strikes throughout west
- Large mining operations dominated
 - Metals for industry more profitable than gold & silver
 - Destructive mining practices and pollution
- Mining towns were “melting pots”
 - Virginia City
- Boom & Bust cycles – mobile population would move on to next strike elsewhere
- Mark Twain - *Roughing It* – 1872
 - Twain’s account of mining towns

The Cattle Industry

- Open-range cattle ranching boom 1860s-80s
 - The profitable “Long Drive” cattle bonanza
 - Glorification of the cowboy
 - Once a drifter – now strong, brave, reliable
 - Owen Wister – *The Virginian*
 - Never made much profit from the boom
 - Most worked a year or two then moved on
- Cattle Trails (Chisholm, Goodnight-Loving) & Railheads (Abilene, Dodge City, Cheyenne)
- Overgrazing, oversupply, range wars brought and end of the “Cattle Kingdom”
 - 1885-87 - Severe winters & drought destroyed entire herds

Cattle Towns

- Towns like Abilene, Dodge City & Wichita KS
- Often lawless at first but brought under control by marshals and sheriffs
 - Regulated firearms, saloons, prostitution, etc.
 - “Wild Bill” Hickok (Abilene)
 - Dime novels exaggerated his story
 - Legend greater than truth – common
- Prostitution a thriving business
 - Came from all social classes and places
 - For \$, escape from old life, by force
 - Took great risks, of disease, violence, addiction
- In time, more women as these towns became more settled
 - Working in many occupations

The Mining and Cattle Frontiers, 1860–1890

Bonanza Farms

- Ag boom starts in 1870s in Dakota Territory
 - Cheap land available following Panic of 1873
 - Very large farms with lots of workers and equipment – 10,000+ acres
 - Leads to North Dakota “Wheat Boom”
 - Tripled population
 - Eastern press reported on huge profits
 - But boom goes bust by 1890
 - Overproduction, high costs, little rain, intl. competition
- California Central Valley most successful bonanza area

Oklahoma Land Rush

- 5 Civilized Tribe participation in Confederacy led U.S. Govt. to punish them by settling other tribes in western Indian Terr. (Oklahoma)
 - Settlers in 1880s argued further punishment
 - Take land & open it to settlement
 - April 22, 1889 Oklahoma Land Rush
 - Boomers and Sooners
 - Eastern part of territory more fertile
 - Poor farming practices lead to Dust Bowl in 1930s

The Oklahoma Land Rush, 1889–1906

The West of Legends

- Frontiersman as virtuous and innocent – untainted by corruptions of society
 - Kit Carson – image vs. reality
 - “Buffalo Bill” Cody – powerful moral force
 - Depicted in dime novels
 - Drives off Indians and rounds up villains

- Wild West Show – horsemanship & marksmanship + mock cowboys vs. Indians
 - Reinforces image of west
- Wister's *The Virginian* (1902)
 - Honest, strong, compassionate
 - Protector of the weak, fighter of evil
- Western myth far removed from reality of the west

National Parks and Conservation

- John Wesley Powell warns of need for control of water resources -1878
- Congress creates -
 - Yellowstone Natl. Park - 1872
 - Yosemite Natl. Park - 1890
 - To preserve the lands and resources "for all time"
- John Muir - The most prominent voice for conservation
 - Campaigned for preservation of redwoods
 - Contributed to establishment of Yosemite
 - First president of the Sierra Club – to protect wilderness in mountains of the west

The Turner Thesis

- "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement, explain American development."
- Historian Frederick Jackson Turner of the University of Wisconsin
- "*Significance of the Frontier in American History*"
- "The frontier is gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history."

The Turner Thesis

- 1890 U.S. Census shows enough population to claim West no longer a frontier
- Turner's work reflects idealized view of frontier that was popular at the time
 - Turner - American character shaped more by frontier
 - More than by European influence?
 - Immigrant or Native Am. contributions?

IMPACT OF THE FRONTIER

- Social Equality
- Growth of Political Democracy
- Nationalism
- Faith in the Future
- Economic Independence
- Safety Valve for Factory Workers
- Invention
- Wasteful Agriculture

Possible Effects of the Close of the Frontier

- No more "safety valve" for laborers & others looking for a new start?
- Likely calls for restrictions on immigration?
- The need for conservation of land and resources?
- Increased American imperialism – looking for a new frontier?