

SETTLING THE WEST: 1865-1890

Intro: **Frederick Jackson Turner**: *Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893)

"Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development."

- A. Argued closing of the frontier had ended an era in American history.
- B. Used census report of 1890 to explain that settlement of the frontier had provided an explanatory framework for American development.
- C. His work also illustrates the psychological power of the frontier in that, with its passing, Americans began to realize that revitalizing opportunities were also vanishing.

I. "Great West" or the "Great American Desert"

- A. From the Great Plains in the east to the California desert in the west.
- B. Flood of whites to area after Civil War
 - 1865, no white people in area (except Mormons in Utah & scattered Spanish-Mexican settlements in Southwest).
- C. Area inhabited by Plains Indians inc. Sioux & Comanche, southwestern Indians inc. Apache & Navajo, and NW Indians including Nez Perce and Shoshoni.
- D. By 1890, entire area carved into states except for four territories.
 - 1. Pioneers poured into the vast area in one of the most rapid settlements of such a vast area in all history.
 - 2. Expansion spurred by the Homestead Act of 1862 (see later pages)
- E. Native Americans stood in the way of expansion on two fronts: westward from the trans-Mississippi East and eastward from the Pacific Coast; epic clash inevitable.
- F. African-Americans
 - 1. 18% of California population by 1890
 - 2. Many involved in fur trade in 1820s and 1840s.
 - 3. Over 500,000 lived west of Mississippi; many came west as slaves
 - 4. After 1877, about 200,000 blacks moved West, many homesteading in Kansas or Oklahoma.
 - 5. As many as 1 in 4 cowboys were black

II. Subduing of Native Americans

- A. Plains Indians
 - 1. Spanish-introduced horse in 16th, 17th and 18th centuries made Indians more nomadic and war-like as they had more range and competed for resources.
 - 2. By 1860, tens of thousands of buffalo-hunting Indians roamed the western plains.
 - a. Their society was organized into tribes, which were usually subdivided into "bands" of about 500 men and women, each with a governing council.
 - b. Women assumed domestic and artistic roles, while men hunted, traded, and supervised religious and military life.
 - c. Each tribe's warrior class competed with others to establish reputation for bravery.
 - d. Western tribes never successfully united politically or militarily against white power, thus contributing to their defeat by the white society.
 - 3. Government policy toward native Americans: Federal gov't traditionally regarded Indian tribes both as independent nations and as wards of the state and therefore negotiated treaties with them that required ratification by the Senate.
 - a. Tribes often victimized by incompetent white officials charged with protecting them.
 - b. As white settlers moved west, exerted more pressure for access to Indian lands.
 - c. Gov't frequently responded by violating treaties they made with Native Americans.
 - d. Concentration policy: 1851, U.S. gov't began policy of inducing tribes to "concentrate" in certain "inviolable" areas to the north and south of intended white settlement.

- e. Policy intensified during 1860s; Indians herded into still smaller areas -- "relocation"
 - i. **Sioux** "guaranteed" sanctuary of Black Hills in Dakota Territory.
 - ii. Other tribes relocated to "Indian Territory" (present-day Oklahoma)
 - iii. **Bureau of Indian Affairs** in the Department of the Interior in charge of the reservations.
- 4. Indians surrendered ancestral lands provided that they would be left alone and provided with food, clothing and other supplies.
 - a. Federal Indian agents often corrupt giving poor or damaged provisions.
 - Some profited handsomely from "savings" of expenditures
 - b. Treaties often disregarded flagrantly while lands seized and game killed.
 - c. Poor administration by BIA resulted in constant conflicts between tribes and nearby white settlers.
- B. Warfare
 - 1. 1868-1890, constant warfare raged in Western area between Indians & whites.
 - a. U.S. troops largely made of Civil War veterans
 - i. 1/5 of all soldiers assigned to frontier were black (**Buffalo Regiment**)
 - ii. Led by Sherman, Sheridan ("the only good Indian is a dead Indian") and Custer.
 - b. Plains Indians expert fighters who often had state-of-the-art weapons supplied from fur traders. (repeating rifles)
 - 2. **Sand Creek Massacre**, Colorado, 1864
 - a. 1861, Cheyenne & Arapaho forced into desolate Sand Creek reservation due to gold mining.
 - b. **Colonel J. M. Chivington's** militia massacred in cold blood about 400 Indians who thought they had been promised immunity and protective custody by the gov't.
 - 3. Sioux War of 1876-1877
 - a. Began when gold miners rushed to Black Hills of S.D. in 1875 stamped.
 - b. Warriors led by **Sitting Bull** took the warpath after treaties violated.
 - c. Led by **George A. Custer**, federal forces pursued Sioux
 - d. **Battle of Little Big Horn**
 - i. Custer's forces clashed with 2,500 well armed warriors in eastern Montana led by **Crazy Horse**
 - ii. Custer and his 264 men completely wiped out; about 150 Indians dead
 - e. U.S. reinforcements eventually drove Sitting Bull to Canada where he received political asylum; hunger forced them to return and surrender by 1876.
 - 5. **Nez Perce** led by **Chief Joseph** (located in Idaho 250 miles west of Portland, Oregon)
 - a. Chief Joseph noble & humane leader, earlier helped white settlers & explorers.
 - b. Nez Perce had ceded much land to U.S. in 1855 in return for large reservation in Oregon and Idaho; later ceded more lands when gold discovered
 - c. 1877, U.S. gov't ordered removal of Nez Perce from Wallowa Valley in Oregon by agreement or by force.
 - d. War ensued and Nez Perce won several battles before fleeing.
 - e. Nez Perce 75-day, 1,500 mile retreat to Canada; sought out Sitting Bull's camp in Canada but subdued only 30 miles from border -- 1 day)
 - f. Nez Perce shipped south to malaria infested camp in Kansas before final relocation in Oklahoma; had been promised a reservation in the Dakotas.
 - Over a third died of disease
 - g. Nez Perce eventually allowed to return to northwest but not Wallowa Valley.
 - 6. **Apache**
 - a. Cochise led successful 9-year guerrilla war from base in Rocky Mountains
 - Americans offered deal but later reneged
 - b. Apache then led by Geronimo (Arizona, New Mexico)

- c. Pursued by Federals into Mexico and finally induced to surrender
- d. Many Apache became successful farmers in OK, where they raised cattle.

7. **Battle of Wounded Knee** (1890) -- last major clash between U.S. troops and Indians.

- a. Issue: Army sent end sacred "Ghost Dance" that had spread to the Dakota Sioux.
- i. Believers of cult expected buffalo to return and God's wrath to wipe the

white man from the face of the earth.

- ii. Fearful whites (many were Christian reformers on reservations) successfully urged

U.S. gov't to make it illegal.

- b. 300 Sioux men, women, & children massacred in S.D.; 60 U.S. soldiers killed

C. Result of Indian Wars

- 1. By 1890, effectively all North American tribes in reservations

- a. U.S. gov't felt it was cheaper to feed Indians than to fight them.
- b. Many reservations grossly ignored by gov't.

- 2. Killing of buffalo resulted in Indians being subdued

- a. Extermination of buffalo eliminated food supply, skins, etc. (most sig.)
- b. Originally 50 million alive; 15 million in 1868; less than 1,000 by 1885

- c. Much food supply during railroad construction came from bison while U.S. Army and agents of BIA also encouraged bison slaughter.

- 3. Railroads: transported troops, farmers, cattlemen, sheepherders, & settlers

- 4. White diseases ravaged Native Americans as well as alcohol.

D. National sentiment began to urge reform toward Native Americans

- 1. **Helen Hunt Jackson: *A Century of Dishonor*** (1881)

- a. Chronicled record of gov't ruthlessness and deceit toward Indians.
- b. Had similar emotional impact of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- c. Inspired movement to assimilate Indians "for their own good."

- 2. **Dawes Severalty Act** of 1887 (Allotment Act) -- during Cleveland's first term

- a. Reflected forced-civilization views of reformers (and western land speculators)

b. Provisions

- i. Dissolved many tribes as legal entities

- ii. Wiped out tribal ownership of land.

- iii. Set up individual Indian family heads with allotment of 160 free acres.

- iv. Designed to eradicate Indian culture ("for their own good")

- If Indians "behaved" like "good white settlers," they would get full title to their holdings and citizenship in 25 years.
- Probationary period later extended.

c. Results:

- i. Accelerated already advanced decay of traditional Indian culture.

- Army-style boarding schools set up where Indians prohibited to exercise any

portion of their culture.

- ii. 2/3 of Indians' remaining land was lost

- 1889 land rushes took what was once Cherokee, Creek, & other

lands

- iii. Remained gov't's official Indian policy until 1934 when Indian Reorganization Act ("the Indian New Deal") tried to restore tribal basis of Indian life.

- iv. Helped Indian population to grow from about 243,000 in 1887 to 1.5 million in 1990.

- d. Indians finally received full citizenship in 1924.

- e. Today, 2 million Native Americans live in U.S.

III. Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad on the Frontier

A. Established **three western frontiers**

- 1. Mining

- 2. Cattle

- 3. Farming (largely made possible by homesteading or land purchases from railroads)

B. Towns sprang up along railroad routes

- 1. Railroads given alternating square miles of territory 3 miles wide on each side of the track.

- 2. Railroads sold much land to settlers

IV. Mining in the West (first of three frontiers)

A. Mineral-rich areas of the West were the first to extensively settled.

- 1. Following prospectors and commercial miners, ranchers and farmers followed.

- 2. Copper, lead, tin, quartz, & zinc more profitable than gold or silver in the long term.

B. Pike's Peak, Colorado

- 1. Gold discovered in 1858 and thousands of "Pike's Peakers" rushed West.

- 2. Though only a few of the 100,000 "59-ers" profited, thousands stayed in region to mine silver, or farm grain.

C. Comstock Lode discovered in Nevada in 1859 (gold and silver)

- Big population influx resulted in statehood in 1864 (gave Lincoln 3 electoral votes)

D. Copper mining -- Colorado, Montana, Wyoming

- Increased demand for copper due to increased use of telegraph wires, electric wires, and telephone wires.

- E. Boom towns to ghost towns occurred when mines petered out and towns abandoned.

- F. Corporations gradually came to dominate mining (need large capitalization)

G. Significance of mining

- 1. Attracted population and wealth to the Wild West

- 2. Helped finance the Civil War

- 3. Facilitated building of the railroads.

- 4. Intensified conflict between whites and Indians.

- 5. Enabled gov't to resume specie payments in 1879

- 6. Introduced the silver issue into American politics.

- 7. Added to American folklore and literature e.g. Bret Harte & Mark Twain.

V. Cattle raising (second of three frontiers)

- A. Transcontinental railroad facilitated transportation of meat from long-horned cattle to cities.

- 1. Cattle now driven to stockyards (e.g. Kansas City & Chicago)

- 2. Beef tycoons like the Swifts and Armour's emerged

- 3. Refrigerator cars allowed transportation of fresh meat from stockyards to East.

B. "Long Drive"

- 1. Mexican ranchers had developed ranching techniques later used by Texans, then by Great

Plains cattlemen and cowboys.

- Spanish words: rodeo, bronco, lasso,

- 2. Texas **cowboys** included former Confederate soldiers, northern whites, blacks, and Mexicans.

- 3. Cowboys drove herds through the plains until they reached a railroad terminal

- e.g. Abilene (KA), Dodge City, Ogallala (NB), and Cheyenne (WY).

C. Challenges to the "long drive"

- 1. Homesteaders brought out by trans-continental railroad built barbed-wire (invented by

- Joseph Glidden)** fences that were too numerous to be cut down by the Cowboys.

- 2. Terrible winter of 1885-86 & 1886-1887 followed by scorching summer killed

thousands of steer.

- 3. Overgrazing and overexpansion also took their toll.

- 4. Ranchers built heartier stock and fenced them into controlled lands where they could

feed and water them to keep them healthy.

VI. Farming (the third western frontier)

A. **Homestead Act of 1862**

- 1. Settler could acquire as much as 160 acres of land by living on it 5 yrs, improving it, and paying a nominal fee averaging about \$30 (as low as \$10)

- Residency on land required for ownership

- 2. As an alternative, land might be acquired after only 6 months' residence at \$1.25/acre.

B. Departure from previous federal land policy (selling land for revenue)

- Now, given away to encourage settlement of the West and stimulus to the family farm

C. Results

- 1. About 500,000 families migrated to the West. (20,000 by 1865)

- Yet, about 5X as many purchased lands from railroads, land

companies, or states.

2. Thousands of homesteaders, maybe 2 of 3, forced to give up in the face of
inadequate 160 acre plots and drought, hail, and ravage from insects.
3. Perhaps 10X more of public domain ended up belonging to promoters, not farmers.

-- Corporations used "dummy" homesteaders to grab the best properties

containing lumber, minerals, and oil.

4. Federal trend of "free land" lasted until 1934

D. Development of the **Great American Desert**

1. Black sod of the prairies (e.g. Kansas) could now be developed with special plows.
-- Land became extremely fruitful and shattered the myth of the Great American Desert
2. Railroads played a role in taming the West.
 - a. Profitable marketing of crops.
 - b. Inducing Americans & European immigrants to buy cheap lands earlier granted by gov't.
3. Improved irrigation techniques helped deserts to bloom (e.g. Mormons in Utah)
4. Tough strains of wheat resistant to cold imported from Russia.
5. Flour-milling process by John S. Pillsbury of Minneapolis, increased demand for grain.
6. **Barbed-wire** invented by **Joseph F. Glidden** in 1874
 - a. By 1883, his company using his patent was making 600 miles of wire each day.
 - b. Gave farmer greater protection against trespassing cattle

VII. End of the Frontier

A. Incredible growth from 1870s to 1890s

1. New states: Colorado (1876)
 2. 1888-1889: Republican Congress admitted six new States as they sought more
Republican electoral votes: ND, SD, MT, WA, ID, WY
 3. Utah admitted in 1896 after it banned polygamy in 1890.
- ##### B. **Oklahoma Land Rush**, April 22, 1889
1. U.S. made available to settlers vast stretches of land formerly occupied by the
Creeks and Seminoles in the district of Oklahoma.
 2. Nearly 100, 000 "boomers" or "eighty-niners" poured in from the OK border.
 - a. By day's end, nearly 2 million acres had been settled.
 - b. "Sooners" – land grabbers who claimed land illegally before land rush began.
 3. By years end, OK had 60,000 inhabitants and Congress made it a territory.
 4. In 1907, it became "the Sooner State."
- ##### C. In 1890, the superintendent of the census announced that for the first time in U.S.

History, a frontier line was no longer discernible.

1. All unsettled areas now broken into by isolated bodies of settlement.
 2. Yet, more millions of acres taken up after 1890 than between 1862 & 1890.
 3. Once frontier was gone, farmers could not move west in significant numbers.
-- Had to stay and fight to improve their lot by organizing for political purposes.
- #### D. "Safety valve" theory
1. Supposedly, when hard times came, city unemployed moved west to farm and prospered.
 2. In reality, few city folk in populous eastern centers migrated to frontier during depressions.
 - a. Did not know how to farm or could not raise necessary \$ for transportation, livestock, and machinery.
 - b. Most settlers who moved west came from farms on older frontier.
 - c. In fact, near century's end, many farmers moved to the city.
 3. Free acreage did lure immigrant farmers who would otherwise have stayed in
eastern cities further increasing the perils of the slums.
 4. Frontier did lure restless and adventurous spirits, mostly young, who wanted to
achieve the "American Dream"
 5. Frontier did have a psychological impact on easterners who could, if they desired,

flee to the frontier.

-- May have had an impact in wage increases for eastern workers.

VIII. The Farm Becomes a Factory

A. Mississippi region experienced somewhat of an agricultural revolution after the Civil War.

1. Farmers concentrated on a single cash-crop such as wheat or corn.
 - a. America became the world's breadbasket and meat producer.
 - b. Farm attained status of a factory.

2. Massive migration of white and black Americans out of Southern Cotton Belt.

-- Largest population shift in American history (most of whom were white).

3. Large-scale commercial agriculture under auspices of entrepreneurial capitalists of the New South, spread beyond plantations into predominantly white small farming regions.

B. For farmers, represented one of most wrenching changes in American history.

1. "**Crop lien**" system was the basis of the commercialization of southern agriculture.
 - a. A planter or merchant extended a line of credit (at exorbitant interest rates) to a
moneyless farmer.
 - i. Impossible for farmer to get out of debt.
 - ii. Resulted in many poor white and black farmers becoming landless tenant farmers or sharecroppers.
 - b. Credit merchants who came to power in post-Reconstruction South acquired much land
at the expense of small farmers.
 - i. 1870s: 20% of Southern farmers were tenants, mostly freed slaves.
 - ii. 1910s: 50% of farmers were tenants, many were newly landless whites.
 2. Some small-scale farmers, unskilled in business, often blamed banks and railroads rather
than their own shortcomings for their losses.
 3. Gave rise to Populist movement of victimized farmers.
- ##### C. Economic problems plaguing farmers
1. Deflated currency and low food prices were the chief worries among farmers.
 2. Natural disasters: freezing temperatures, insects, diseases
 3. Government-added woes
 - a. Farmers' land often over assessed making property taxes higher.
 - b. Protective tariffs hurt the South as manufactured product prices increased
-- Farmers products unprotected in competitive world market.
 4. Agricultural-related trusts soaked farmers: barbed-wire trust, fertilizer trust, harvester trust, and railroad trust (freight rates)
 5. Farmers underrepresented politically and poorly organized