

AP United States History
Unit 6: The Nation Expands
Topic- The West- Part 2 of 2

The West

Explain the causes and effects of the settlement of the West from 1877 to 1898.

In hopes of achieving ideals of self-sufficiency and independence, migrants moved to both rural and boomtown areas of the West for opportunities, such as building the railroads, mining, farming, and ranching.

A migration of settlers into the West started with the end of the Mexican-War in 1848. Though a trickle of settlers had moved into the Oregon Territory and what it Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and Colorado, it was the discoveries of precious metals in the years leading up to the Civil War which began to lure migrants from the Eastern United States and immigrants in large numbers to begin to move into the West. The Civil War put a temporary halt to the migration of settlers into the West. When it came to an end, the development of the Transcontinental Railroad, new discoveries of precious metals, and the lure of open land, led to a renewed wave of migration into the West.

Those who migrated into the West, created communities together almost overnight. Mining boomtowns became some of the most populated cities in the country during the period. Cowtowns– railroad hub cities throughout the West, grew in importance during the period. Small farming communities also developed throughout the West. Hotels, restaurants, saloons, and businesses developed in these growing cities and communities throughout the West. Families settled in the small communities of the West, but for the most part, single, young men settled in the boomtowns and cowtowns throughout the period. Therefore, in the West, women were also able to play more prominent roles in their communities. In fact, women received the right to vote in the new states of the West before the 19th Amendment granted women's suffrage in 1920.

Immigrants made up a major component of the population of the West during the period, as well. Irish immigrants made up a majority of the immigrants who came to work on the Transcontinental Railroad system as it moved westward. From the West, Chinese immigrants came in large numbers to construct the railroads, participate in the mining of precious metals, and to set-up their own businesses. During the 1840s and 1850s, the fear of the large number of Irish immigrants– the vast majority of whom were Catholic was one the driving forces for the development of nativism. The rise of nativism in the decade prior to the Civil War led to the development of an anti-immigrant political party– the Know-Nothings, who actually won a number of elections during the mid-1850s, prior to disappearing from the political scene on the eve of the Civil War.

After the war, it was the waves of Chinese immigrants which drew deep concerns and led to a second rise of nativism, or anti-immigrant sentiment. While Chinese immigrants were attracted by the promise of work on the railroads, it was the Taiping Rebellion, a destructive conflict which ravaged the Chinese countryside and killed more than 25 million people that also pushed immigrants into the United States from China. The fear that the influx of Chinese immigrants would take away jobs from Americans, or European immigrants who had migrated into the West was the chief reason for the development of hostility toward them. But, the uneasiness with the customs of the Chinese immigrants– their language, their dress, their mannerisms and their religion, made them a target for the ire of nativists. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed. Chinese immigration was banned for ten years. The ban was reinstated in 1892. It was the first time that a group of immigrants from

another country had been banned. In fact, Chinese immigrants were not allowed to come into the United States until 1943, at the height of U.S. involvement in the Second World War, when the ban was finally lifted.

Throughout the period, immigration would be a major factor in the development of the American industrial economy in the decades following the Civil War. By the end of the 19th century, a process of Americanization began. The focus of this effort occurred mainly in the public school systems throughout the country, but especially in the major port cities where large numbers of immigrants settled. However, immigrants were not the only people in America who were becoming a part of the process of Americanization during this period. On the Great Plains, the Native Americans valiantly attempted to resist the tide of American expansion in the West. In the end, the Native Americans, too, would become a part of the process of Americanization. But, it did not occur without a fight.

As migrant populations increased in number and the American bison population was decimated, competition for land and resources in the West among white settlers, American Indians, and Mexican Americans led to an increase in violent conflict.

The U.S. government violated treaties with American Indians and responded to resistance with military force, eventually confining American Indians to reservations and denying tribal sovereignty.

With the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, a fascinating historical process occurred that would change the lives of the Native Americans who were living on the Great Plains for more than two centuries. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 introduced the Native Americans who were living on the Great Plains to the horse. Prior to their introduction to the horse, Native American tribes such as the Apache, Cheyenne, Comanche, Kiowa, and the Sioux, eked out a grim existence as hunter-gatherers in small bands in the Rocky Mountains of the central United States, in the present-day states of Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming, Montana, and what is today, the Black Hills of South Dakota.

The horse enabled the Native Americans of the Great Plains to be able to hunt the great herds of bison which roamed the prairies in overwhelming numbers (perhaps 15 million by 1800). It enabled them to also trade with and, at times, to harass other Native American groups, whose lives revolved around agriculture and the seasons. But, the powerful nomadic Native American groups of the Great Plains with their skilled horsemanship were able to avoid the fate of the sedentary agricultural brethren. European contacts, and later contacts with Americans brought diseases which more than weapons of war, led to the demise of— in some cases— entire tribal groups. As the tribal groups on the Great Plains were nomadic and had fewer contacts with either the Europeans or the Americans, the diseases that these new migrants carried did not impact them as much.

With their horsemanship, knowledge of the landscape, and raiding skills, the Native Americans of the Great Plains— despite their relatively small numbers— became perhaps the most formidable foes to either the Europeans or the Americans and often thwarted their interests in settling the lands that they claimed. During the Civil War, the Native Americans sided with the Confederacy and often raided Union outposts. But, when the Civil War came to an end, Americans began to settle on the Great Plains in ever-increasing numbers. This migration set the stage for the final showdown between the Native Americans and the United States of America. In the end, thirty years of tragic conflict brought the way of life for the Native Americans of the Great Plains to a conclusion.

With the end of the Mexican War and the beginning of the California Gold Rush of 1849, American settlers began moving across the Great Plains and into the territories of the Plains tribes. In an effort to prevent hostilities, the federal government signed the Treaty of Laramie in 1851. This agreement was designed to give American settlers the ability to travel across Native American lands on their way to both California and Oregon. For a time, it worked. The first outbreak of fighting between the Native Americans and the American settlers making their way into the West occurred in Minnesota in 1862. The Sioux, who were a part of this uprising had been confined into a reservation area and were denied foodstuffs by the local population. After a murderous

rampage, the Sioux were then hunted down and captured. What resulted was the largest mass execution in American history, despite the fact that many of the Sioux warriors had their sentences commuted by President Abraham Lincoln. However, as the war dragged on, the task of dealing with Native American raids often fell to local, state or even territorial militias. It was a recipe for disaster. In 1864, on the Southern Plains, a Colorado militia slaughtered a band of Cheyenne— mostly composed of women and children in cold blood. The Sand Creek Massacre, as it was referred to, was followed-up a massacre of federal troops in Wyoming in 1866 (Fetterman's Massacre). Both of these massacres led to a debate about how the federal government should deal with the Native Americans in 1867. In the end, by 1868, most Americans determined that the Native Americans should be Christianized, assimilated into the broader society, and placed onto reservations. It would involve the destruction of an ecological resource upon which the Native Americans depended— the bison, who were slaughtered in untold numbers. This bloody and tragic process took almost twenty-five years to complete.

The Indian Wars were fought from 1871-1875, and began on the Great Plains. Promised lands on which to hunt by the federal government, the Comanche and Kiowas of the Southern Plains continued hunting buffalo, but also raided and harrassed settlements in Texas. By 1874, there was a concerted effort on the part of federal troops to bring these powerful Native Americans groups back into the reservation system. Within a year, with their food supplies decimated, the last of the Comanche and Kiowa bands were forced to accept reservation life in the present-day state of Oklahoma.

On the Northern Plains, the Cheyenne, Sioux, and the Nez Perce battled against federal troops after gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1874. After the destruction of a federal cavalry detachment at the Battle of Little Bighorn in present-day Montana, the tribes of the Northern Plains were also subdued and placed onto reservations, as well. By 1886, the final Apache bands had surrendered in the Southwest. But, in 1890, with the rise of the Ghost Dance— a movement in which the Native Americans believed that their ancestors would deliver them from the bullets of the American troops, the finishing stroke occurred at Wounded Knee Creek in what is now present-day South Dakota. The massacre at Wounded Knee led to the slaughter of a band of Sioux— most of those who were murdered were women and children who were shot to death when they tried to escape from enraged American soldiers who believed that one of the Native American warriors had discharged a weapon. After Wounded Knee, the American frontier, once a mythic line where no person had ever been before and or settled, had come to an end.

The Americanization process for the Native Americans began during the 1880s. In 1887, the Dawes Severalty Act, passed by the federal government, attempted to make Native Americans who were confined to reservations on the Great Plains into farmers. Native American children were also sent to boarding schools in the East, in places such as Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In each of these schools, an effort was made to make Native Americans fit into the growing American culture— in the process, it made it more difficult for them to maintain their tribal identities. The Dawes Act had a striking pair of fundamental flaws. First, it made the attempt to make tribal bands of hunter-gatherers into farmers on land that was ill-suited for the purpose of doing so. Second, it allowed for the land to be easily sold to non-Natives, because if a Native American family did not take their allotment of land, they could not become citizens under the law and the land could be easily sold.

The process of redistributing Native lands diminished the reservation system, and also made it difficult for them to continue to keep their tribal identities. In 1924, after years of frustration, the American Indian Citizenship Act was passed which made every Native American an American citizen. During the Great Depression, the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt passed the U.S. Indian Reorganization Act which allowed each of the Native American tribes to have more autonomy over their own affairs and ended the land allotment system of the Dawes Act in 1934. By 1968, some Native Americans groups had formed AIM— the American Indian Movement to fight for better conditions on the reservations and to bring attention to civil rights issues. Even today, the reservation system remains as the place where some Native Americans tribes still live, work and raise their families.

By 1893, America was a nation that had become a true industrial power whose business interests were operating on a global scale. Immigrants were pouring into the nation during the period and this process fueled the tremendous industrial and urban growth that the nation would experience at that time. The conquest of the American West and the destruction of the Native American way of life came at a time when the great industrial powers of Europe were creating colonies by also conquering indigenous peoples in both Asia and Africa. This period saw a tremendous wave of technological innovation, industrial growth, and urbanization that was fueled by a steady stream of immigration into the United States. This period is often referred to as the Gilded Age in American history.