



Chapter 4 The Great West and the Rise of

Populism

Section I	Competency 4 / Objective 1
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I. WESTERN MIGRATION

Objective 4.014

RELIGION

With the expansion of US territory in the 1800s came the inevitable migration of settlers west. These settlers had a number of different motivations for tackling the frontier. For some, it was their religious faith. Many Christian missionaries ventured into the new territories in hopes of

spreading the message of Jesus to the Native Americans. The **Mormons** sought to escape persecution. Mormons were a religious group founded by **Joseph Smith** (1805 – 1844). In 1830, Smith published *The Book of Mormon*, which he claimed was a translation of writings given to him by an angel. The book became the foundation of the Mormon faith. It led to beliefs for which the group was often ridiculed. People criticized the community for teaching and practicing polygamy (the practice of having more than one wife) and for giving Smith too much power as a self-proclaimed “prophet.” In 1844, a mob in Illinois killed Joseph Smith and forced the group to seek refuge out west. Under the leadership of **Brigham Young** (1801 – 1877), the Mormons left Illinois and eventually settled in present day Utah.

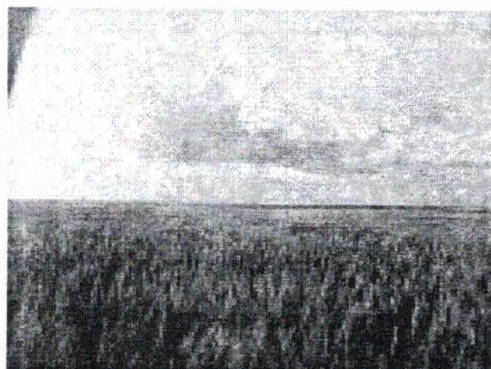


Mormon Trek to Utah

GOLD

The hope of getting rich was another reason many went west. The **Gold Rush of 1849** attracted thousands to California and eventually led to statehood for the territory. Ten years later, in 1859, large numbers of people rushed to the region of western Nevada after hearing about the **Comstock Lode**. Named for a miner involved in the find, it was the richest discovery of precious ores in history. Gold ultimately became one of the major reasons for conflict between white settlers and Native Americans.

LAND



Oklahoma Farm Land
Photo by Dorothea Lange

New territory meant that more people now had the opportunity to own land. In 1862, Congress passed two pieces of legislation that further encouraged western settlement. The **Homestead Act** stated that anyone who would agree to cultivate 160 acres of land for five years would receive title to that land from the federal government. Since the prairies of the Midwest lacked wood and other traditional building materials, settlers learned to build and live in **sod houses**. Sod from the thick prairie grass was abundant and proved to be very strong and durable.

That same year, the **Morrill Land-Grant Act** distributed millions of acres of western territory to state governments. These state governments then sold the land to fund agriculture “land-grant” colleges. Such colleges served to teach farmers how to use new technology and deal with the unfamiliar terrain of the Midwest. The Homestead Act and Morrill Land-Grant Acts greatly increased the number of western settlers in the years following the Civil War.

As more and more people moved west, many began to call on the US government to open Indian lands for settlement. In 1889, Congress finally agreed and central Oklahoma was declared open. Roughly 50,000 people gathered at the Oklahoma border waiting for the gun shot that would officially announce that the territory was available. The **Oklahoma Land Rush** featured people on horseback, bicycles, in wagons and on foot, all surging forward to stake their claim. Some jumped the gun to get a head start and get there sooner. Hence, Oklahoma achieved the nickname the “Sooner State.”

WOMEN, IMMIGRANTS, AND AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE WEST

While moving west certainly presented great challenges and even dangers, **women** who settled west often found that they enjoyed greater freedom and flexibility than could be had in the cities of the East. Circumstances on the frontier required a more flexible society and meant that women often had the opportunity to take on roles traditionally only open to men. These new freedoms also served to attract women to the West who otherwise might not have been willing to take on the



Buffalo Soldiers

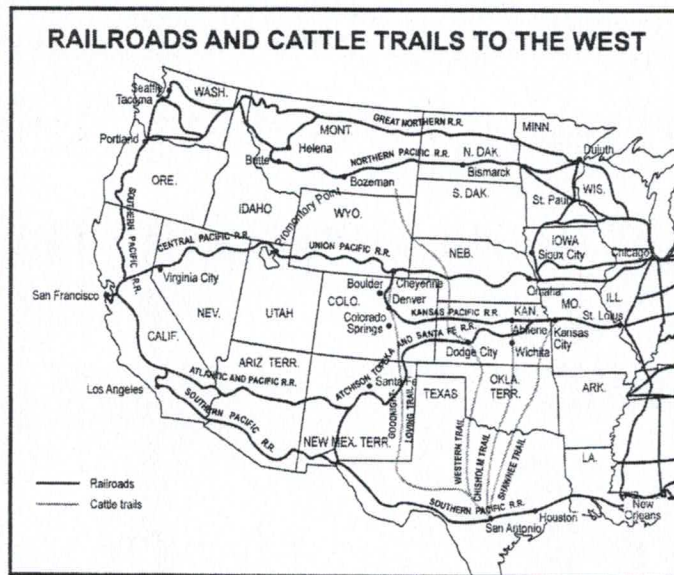
challenges of the frontier. The West also saw a wave of foreign immigrants. **Chinese immigrants** who arrived via the west coast and **Irish immigrants** who settled much of the northern Midwest, both played major roles in the development of the railroads. Meanwhile, in addition to also working on the railroads, **African Americans** often served as cowhands on western ranches. Although many of the classic movies about the “Old West” fail to depict it, the truth is that a large number of cowboys in the 1800s were actually African Americans who moved west after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. Many African Americans also served out west as soldiers in the United States Army. One group of soldiers who served with distinction on the frontier were the **Buffalo Soldiers** (a name given them by the Native Americans who often had to fight against them). These soldiers were members of four all black regiments that served with distinction and were well known for their bravery in battle.

Practice 1: Western Migration

- Which of the following BEST describes Brigham Young’s motivation for moving west?
 - a desire for gold
 - a desire for land
 - a desire for religious freedom
 - a desire to provide new roles for women
- In what ways did the Homestead Act and the Morrill Land-Grant Act impact western settlement?
 - They both served to make it easier for people to acquire land if they would move west.
 - They both stated that if one discovered gold on a certain piece of land, then that land became theirs.
 - They both ensured religious freedom on the frontier.
 - They both established land grant colleges in the Oklahoma territory.
- What key roles did immigrants and African Americans play in the western territories?

II. WHITE SETTLEMENT AND NATIVE AMERICANS

Objective 4.02



Railroad and Cattle Trails

The desire of white citizens to settle the West meant inevitable conflict with Native Americans who had lived there for generations. The Plains Indians, for instance, greatly depended on the **buffalo**. They used the buffalo for food, clothing, and shelter. As settlers and fur trappers came into the region, they killed great numbers of buffalo for their hides and to make way for ranchers' herds of cattle. By 1889, only 1,000 buffalo were left on the continent. As a result, the Plains Indians could no longer continue their way of life.

The rise of the **cattle industry** greatly affected the Plains Indians.

Because of the interaction between white settlers and Mexicans who already lived throughout the Southwest, **Mexican culture** and language had great impact on how white settlers lived. Shortly after white settlers arrived in Texas, they learned the cattle ranching techniques of the Mexicans who lived there. The Mexicans taught white settlers how to herd, raise, and drive cattle to market. As a result, white ranchers began imitating, not only the Mexicans' ranching techniques, but their dress and culture as well. Cowboy hats and chaps are both examples of Mexican dress that were adopted by western settlers. The growth of the cattle industry contributed to the slaughter of buffalo that otherwise would have competed with cattle for food. It also meant that even more land was taken from Native Americans. "Cowtowns" began to pop up. These were towns to which ranchers would drive their cattle so that they could be herded onto trains and shipped east to market. Cowboys (those who moved the cattle on long drives to these cowtowns) became legendary figures in western culture as a result of this time.

Another important industry that transformed the West was the **mining industry**. Discoveries like the Comstock Lode and those in California meant that people of nearly every background headed west to make their fortune. Mining camps and towns were established and often had the reputation for being wild and full of vice. Eventually, huge corporations moved in with advanced equipment to try and extract more difficult to reach metals. Once again, this all proved detrimental to the Native Americans. Time and time again, Native Americans were forced to relocate to **reservations** (parcels of land set aside by the federal government for the Native Americans), only to be forcibly removed again each time gold was discovered or whites wanted land. Over time, many Native Americans grew bitter and a number of violent wars broke out. Large numbers of Native Americans eventually died as a result of being forced to travel great distances and settle on reservations in lands to which they were not accustomed.

Due to the challenges they faced, Western settlers tended to be independent and hard working. They also held to a strong belief in democracy that would eventually help give “common men” a more important role in politics.

IMPORTANT BATTLES BETWEEN U.S. TROOPS AND NATIVE AMERICANS

THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE AND THE BATTLE OF LITTLE BIGHORN

On a number of occasions, Native American peoples chose to resist white settlement rather than accept being moved off of their land. In 1861, US officials forced the Cheyenne to give up claims to land that had been promised to them. In retaliation, **Chief Black Kettle** (?– 1868) led Cheyenne warriors in several raids on mining camps and local settlements. US forces responded by surprising 500 Cheyenne at Sand Creek. The **Sand Creek Massacre** left 270 Native Americans — most of whom were women and children — dead. When news of Sand Creek spread, other Native American tribes became enraged. Under the leadership of chiefs **Red Cloud** (1822 – 1909) and **Crazy Horse** (1838 – 1877), the Sioux Indians rose up. In



Chief Red Cloud

1876, a US commander named George Armstrong Custer attempted to surprise and defeat the Sioux at the **Battle of the Little Bighorn**. Custer greatly underestimated the size of his enemy’s forces, however, and recklessly rushed into battle. Sioux warriors quickly surrounded the outnumbered US troops, killing Custer and more than 200 of his men. The battle became known as “Custer’s last stand” and would be the last great victory for Native Americans. By 1877, both the Sioux and Cheyenne had surrendered to US troops and were moved to reservations in the Dakotas and Oklahoma.

CHIEF JOSEPH AND THE NEZ PERCE’

The **Nez Perce’** were a tribe led by **Chief Joseph** (1840 – 1904). When the US government attempted to remove them from the Oregon Territory, violence broke out when Nez Perce’ warriors killed several white settlers without Chief Joseph’s blessing. Hoping to avoid further bloodshed, Joseph ordered that the tribe comply with US orders to move to a northern reservation. On the way, however, federal troops attacked the tribe in retaliation for the earlier killings. Chief Joseph began a masterful retreat in which he outmaneuvered his pursuers for several months. He hoped that the Nez Perce’ could avoid US forces and escape into Canada. They were stopped 30 miles from the border, however, and forced to settle on reservations in Oklahoma. The Nez Perce’ almost died out due to sickness and malnutrition.



Chief Joseph

WOUNDED KNEE



Sitting Bull

The last notable armed conflict between US troops and Native Americans occurred in 1890 at **Wounded Knee**. It occurred after a Sioux holy man named Wovoka developed a religious ritual called the Ghost Dance. The Sioux believed that this dance would bring back the buffalo and return the Native American tribes to their land. The dance alarmed white settlers and caused great concern. The government then sent in the US Army. The Army believed that the Sioux leader, **Sitting Bull** (1831 – 1890), was using the Ghost Dance to start a Native American uprising. When soldiers tried to arrest Sitting Bull, a gunfight resulted in the deaths of 14 people, including Sitting Bull himself. Soldiers then pursued the Sioux to Wounded Knee Creek. When a shot rang out, the soldiers started firing. Before it was over, more than 150 Native American men, women, and children — most of whom were unarmed — lay dead.

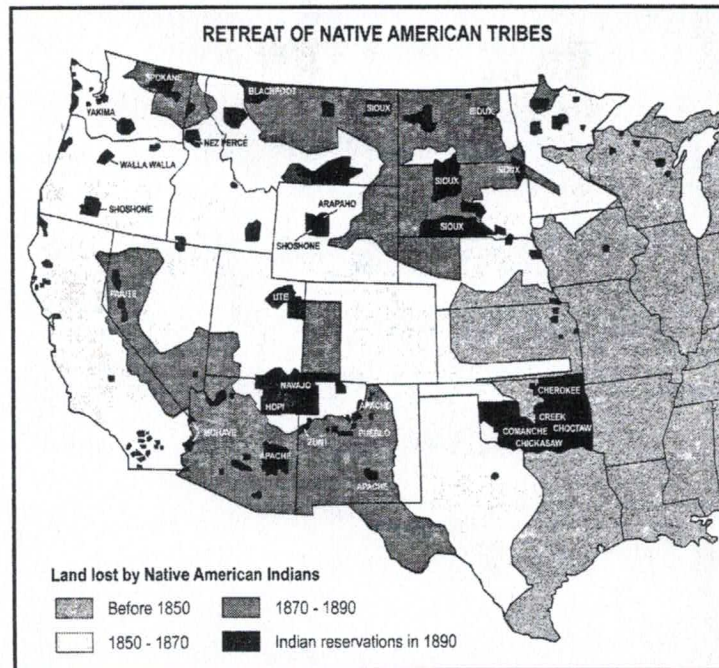
“A CENTURY OF DISHONOR” AND THE DAWES ACT



Helen Hunt Jackson

In 1881, **Helen Hunt Jackson** (1831 – 1885) drew national attention to the sufferings of the Native American peoples with her book, *A Century of Dishonor*. In it, Jackson described the shameful way in which the Native American people had been treated. Her book helped create concern for Native American rights and eventually led to attempts in Washington to better address the plight of Native Americans. One such effort was the **Dawes Act** of 1887. Congress passed this law to **assimilate** (make like the mainstream of society) Native Americans into US culture. It abolished tribal organizations and divided up reservations for the purpose of allotting land to individual Native American families. After twenty-five years, ownership of the land would go to the Native Americans and they would be made US citizens. Unfortunately, the Dawes Act turned out to be a huge failure. Most Native Americans did not want to give up their tribal identity nor be assimilated into white culture. Many had no interest in farming either. Those who wished to farm often were given land not suitable for growing crops or became the victims of dishonest Indian Agents (US officials responsible for managing Native American affairs). In the end, the Dawes Act accomplished little as the Native American population decreased due to poverty and disease.

Chapter 4



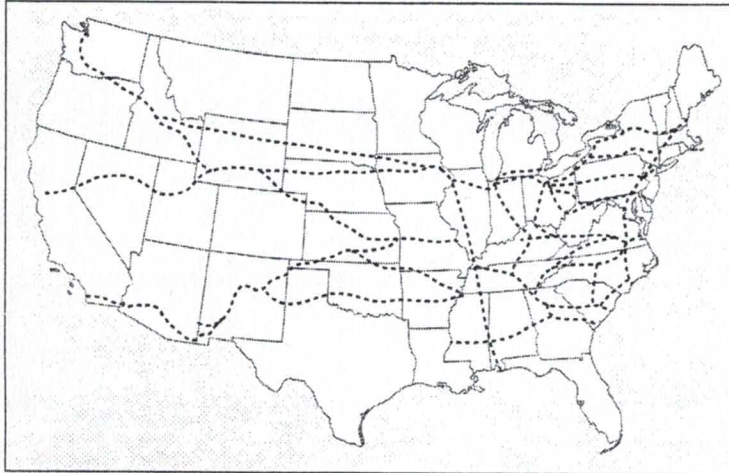
Practice 2: White Settlement and Native Americans

1. What was distinctive about the Battle of Little Bighorn?
 - A. It was one of the few battles that ended with Native Americans surrendering and being relocated to reservations.
 - B. It was the battle in which the famed chief, Sitting Bull, was killed.
 - C. It marked the Native American peoples' largest victory over US military forces.
 - D. It inspired passage of the Dawes Act.
2. Which of the following would be the BEST way to describe the US government's approach to dealing with Native Americans on the frontier in the years following the Civil War?
 - A. Negotiations, in which the aim was to share land peacefully with the tribes that had lived there for generations.
 - B. Compensation, in which the US government paid tribal leaders whatever amount of money the two sides agreed the land was worth.
 - C. Barter, in which Native Americans surrendered land in exchange for citizenship rights and the guarantee of being given land for families to own and farm.
 - D. Conquest, in which the United States used its military to take land previously occupied by Native Americans and relocate tribes to areas designated by the US government.
3. What was the Dawes Act, what did it attempt to do, and why did it fail?

III. RAILROADS, FARMING, AND THE RISE OF POPULISM

Objectives 4.03 and 4.04

THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD



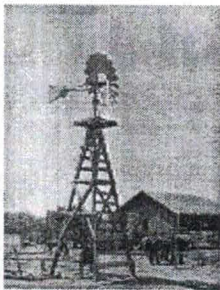
Transcontinental Railroad

Railroads became an important means of transportation in the United States during the second half of the 19th century. In 1862, Congress coordinated an effort among the railroad companies to build a **transcontinental railroad**. Union Pacific (an Eastern rail company) and Central Pacific (a rail company from Sacramento, California) joined their tracks at **Promontory, Utah**, in 1869. As a symbol of their union that now linked the

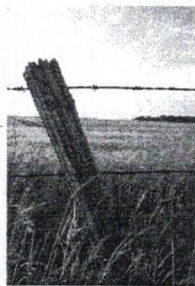
nation east to west, representatives drove a gold spike to mark the occasion. The country owed a debt of gratitude to the labor of many **Irish** and **Chinese immigrants** who contributed greatly to the completion of a railway that now united much of the nation.

FARMING OUT WEST

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY



Windmill



Barbed Wire

In order for western lands to be inhabitable by white settlers, they had to be suitable for farming. A number of technological advances made this possible in the 1800s. **John Deere's steel plow** allowed farmers to plant crops in the Midwest by enabling them to cut through the tough prairie sod. Since farmers often had to dig more than 100 feet to reach water, **windmills** proved crucial because they allowed farmers to harness the winds power to pump water to the surface. On the plains, where trees were scarce and there was not

enough wood for split rail fences, **barbed wire** made it possible for farmers to cheaply and efficiently fence in their land and livestock. Finally, the **railroads** created a way for farmers to import needed equipment from the East while shipping their own products to different parts of the country. As a result, they could afford to farm out west without being isolated from the nation's larger markets.

THE GRANGE AND FARMER ALLIANCES

Farmers encountered problems in the 1870s and 1880s. Overproduction of farm products caused prices to drop drastically, leading to less profits. Simultaneously, the cost of farm equipment and railroad rates rose. As a result, farmers lost money and fell further and further into debt. Many began banding together to protect their interests by collectively standing up to railroads and other industries they felt were overcharging them. Local farmers formed cooperatives called **granges**. Through the grange, they pooled their resources to purchase new machinery and supplies, as well as to sell their produce without paying other distributors. By 1874, farmers joined over 14,000 national associations. Farmers founded a number of other cooperatives as well, such as the **Northwestern Alliance**, the **Southern Farmers' Alliance**, and the **Colored Farmers' National Alliance**.

THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

The concerns of the farmers eventually gave rise to the **Populist Movement** of the late 1800s. The farmers, suffering from the effects of low prices for their products and the crop lien system (system in which farmers borrowed money against their crops, thereby slipping further and further into debt), favored the use of **greenbacks** (paper money) to increase the nation's money supply and ease their burdens by raising prices. Eventually, to increase their political influence among western miners, they also adopted a "free silver" policy. In other words, they supported basing the US dollar on silver as well as gold. This stance was known as **bimetallism**. These two changes, they believed, would serve to pump more money into the nation's economy and ease the burdens on farmers. Farmers who supported Populism wanted more government regulation of business, in particular the railroads and warehouses. This put the Populists at direct odds with big business owners who favored a **laissez-faire** (no government regulation of business) approach to economics. Populists wanted government to regulate the prices that railroads could charge farmers to haul their products and machinery. A number of state legislatures passed laws limiting how much railroads and storage houses could charge. The Supreme Court upheld these laws in the case of *Munn v. Illinois*, in which it stated that states had the right to regulate certain businesses within its own borders. In *Wabash v. Illinois*, however, the Supreme Court held that any railroad traffic across state lines could only be regulated by the federal government. As a result, in 1887, President Grover Cleveland signed into law the **Interstate Commerce Act**. This law provided for the creation of an Interstate Commerce Commission and regulated railroad rates in the name of public interest. The Populist Party also proved attractive to farmers because it advocated the government paying **rebates**, or subsidies, to farmers whose goods did not sell due to overproduction.

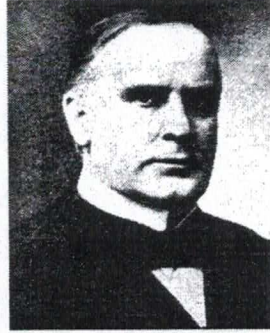
THE OMAHA PLATFORM

Politically, Populism appealed to the "common man." Populism praised agriculture as the backbone of America. It favored both the working classes of the Northeast and the farmers of the South and West. In 1892 the Populists met in Omaha, Nebraska, and adopted their **Omaha Platform**. It called for the unlimited coinage of silver, government regulation of railroads and industry, a graduated income tax, and a number of election reforms.

ELECTION OF 1896



William Jennings Bryan



William McKinley

As the country approached the presidential election of 1896, it was experiencing one of its worst economic depressions ever. This made President Cleveland vulnerable and seemed to present an opportunity for any candidate who could win the support of the Populists. As the depression deepened in 1894, more and more people blamed Cleveland and his decision to repeal the **Sherman Silver Purchase Act** for the worsening condition. The act, which passed

in 1890, allowed for the use of the silver standard (a position supported by the Populists). Cleveland, blaming the silver standard for the nation's economic woes, returned the US to a strictly **gold standard** by repealing the act in 1893. As a result, the silver question became the major issue of the 1896 campaign. When the Democratic Party met at its convention that year, it was divided. Ultimately, the party nominated a fiery speaker named **William Jennings Bryan** (1860 – 1925). Bryan backed bimetallism as a means to spur inflation, raising the price of farm produce. The Populist Party decided to back Bryan and his wing of the Democratic party called the “free silver” group. In addressing the Democratic Convention, Bryan made his famous **Cross of Gold** speech. In it he stated, “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!”

Despite Bryan's abilities as a public speaker and a national campaigner, he could not overcome the split in the Democratic Party. Republican **William McKinley** (1843 – 1901) enjoyed the support of northeastern states that were home to large cities, big business leaders, and lots of electoral votes. He won the presidential election of 1896, marking the end of the Populist Party's influence. A number of Populist ideas, however, would later be adopted by the Progressive Party of the 20th century and would serve to spark reforms in US government.

