

## The Last West and the New South [1865-1900]

In 1877, as the last federal troops withdrew from the South the nation's development shifted westward. The area of attention for settlement became the Great Plains. This vast area is not the best farmland in the nation. With an annual rainfall of under 15 inches, winter blizzards and hot dry summers, the region is very difficult to farm. In addition the area was home to over 250,000 Native Americans who survived as nomads, following the herds of buffalo that numbered approximately 15 million. However, many promises were made to white settlers and, with the addition of gold and silver strikes, the area became the new home for many. Indian Wars developed due to land claims and by 1900 there were no buffalo herds left, they had all been slaughtered needlessly by the encroaching white settlers.

### States added to the Union between 1864-1896

1864 – Nevada	1867 – Nebraska
1876 – Colorado	1889 – Montana
1889 – North Dakota	1889 – South Dakota
1889 – Washington	1890 – Idaho
1890 – Wyoming	1896 – Utah

### The Growth of Mining

Since 1848 there were continued gold strikes in the high lands of the Great Plains.

- 1859 – **Pike's Peak** in Colorado – saw 100,000 miners move to the area
- **The Comstock Lode** in Nevada saw \$ 340 million of gold and silver mined by 1890 which was the reason why Nevada was admitted to the Union. Today Nevada is still known as the "Silver State"

In most mining towns one-half of the population were foreigners from Europe, Latin America and China. In fact, in the 1860's over one-third of the western miners were Chinese.

This influx of foreign workers led to the **Miner's Tax**; a \$ 20.00 per month fee was levied on all foreign miners working in the United States.

**The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882** was passed so that there would be no more Chinese laborers allowed to enter the country. This was the first law in American history passed that was based purely on race and nationality.

Two major problems developed due to the expansion of mining:

1. With the increase in the supply of silver a crisis developed over the relative values of gold and silver backed currency. This became a major political issue in the 1880's and 1890's.
2. Mining created an environmental problem – the Native Americans lost a great deal of land due to poor mining practices and deliberate disposal of waste materials.

## The Cattle Frontier

During the Civil War when the areas west of the Mississippi were segregated most cattle ranches were neglected. The “Texas Longhorn” cow, which originally came from Mexico, was left to roam the southern areas of the Great Plains. After the war these strays became a source of revenue for ranchers and cowboys.

The idea was for cowboys (African Americans and Mexicans who made \$ 1.00 per day) to round up these strays and once rounded, sent in cattle drives to the Kansas City stockyards. There they were sold at auction for \$ 30 to \$ 50 a head. These steers were then placed in rail cars that ultimately ended up at the meat slaughter houses of Chicago.

The practice of cattle drives ended in the 1880’s due to the following factors:-

- overgrazing killed the grass that fed the animals
- winter blizzards and droughts in 1885-1886 killed 90% of the cattle
- homesteaders, with the aid of barbed wire, closed off these open ranges
- new ranches fed cattle in stalls and used hay and grain for faster growth
- the nation’s taste changed to pork as it was cheaper and just as nutritious.

## Arable Farming

**The Homestead Act of 1862:** to encourage settlers the government gave white settlers grants of 160 acre plots per family FREE on the Great Plains. **BUT** the immigrations between 1870-1900 saw some 500,000 families arrive. However they had to buy land on their arrival as their grants were either taken or bought by the railroads and speculators due to loop-holes in the law.

What developed were “**Sodbusters**” – settlers who made their houses of sod.

In addition these newcomers faced several obstacles

- plagues of grasshopper who devoured their crops
- droughts and severe winters
- scarcity of surface water
- a lack of wood that meant no fences for livestock.

Two major inventions helped these settlers live easier

1. the invention of **barbed wire in 1874 by Joseph Glidden** – they could now fence-in their acres.
2. the **mail order catalog** – such as Sears, Roebuck and Co. from where they could purchase windmills and have them delivered to their doorsteps.

160 acres of land was not enough to yield a profit, most families barely survived farming such lots. It was not until the introduction of Dry Farming, Deep Plowing and Russian Wheat (hardier than American) that farmers began to grow a surplus.

## The Removal of Native Americans

New Mexico & Arizona	Southwest	Pacific North West (Washington & Oregon)	Great Plains
<b>Pueblo Groups, i.e. Hopi &amp; Zuni tribes</b> * Permanent farmers	<b>Navajo &amp; Apache</b> * Nomadic hunter-gatherers adapting to crops and livestock along with arts and crafts	<b>Chinook and Shasta</b> * Complex communities around farming of fish and game	<b>Sioux, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Crow, Comanche</b> * Nomadic tribes, expert horse riders who followed the buffalo in small bands of around 300-350 per tribe

White settlers had little understanding of their cultures.

The early Reservation policies began under Andrew Jackson in the 1830's – All area west of the Mississippi River would remain "Indian Country". However, in 1851 definite boundaries were set by the federal government regarding reservations. Most of the Plains tribes refused to honor these restrictions. Prior to 1864 there was sporadic unrest but matters worsened.

**1864** – Colorado militia massacred Cheyenne men, women and children at **Sand Creek**

**1865-1867 - The First Sioux War** saw the tables turned when an army column was wiped out.

Miners refused to stay off Indian lands, especially in the Black Hills of Dakota. The younger braves and chiefs of many tribes denounced the government's treaties.

**1870** – **Red River War** between the federal troops and the Comanche

**1870** – **Second Sioux War** – notable for Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and General George Custer's Last Stand at Little Big Horn.

**1877** – **Nez Percé** tribes were pushed towards Canada, defeated and subsequently surrendered to federal troops.

Constant U.S. Army pressure and the ongoing slaughter of the buffalo herds forced the Native Americans to accept the government's terms.

### Assimilation of Native Americans

A considerable amount of attention was given to the Indian Wars when **Helen Hunt Jackson** wrote "**A Century of Dishonor**" in 1881. Her book created a great deal of sympathy for the Native Indians.

In addition, **Christian boarding schools** were founded (Carlisle School in Pennsylvania) where Native American children were segregated and schooled to learn white culture, farming and industrial skills.

## **The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887**

The purpose of this government plan was to break up any tribal organizations, keeping them from becoming “civilized” The Dawes Act divided up tribal lands into 160 acre plots. For those Native Americans who left their tribes and became “homesteaders” they could become U.S. Citizens if they agreed to remain on that same land for 25 years.

In all 47 million acres of land was distributed to Native Americans **BUT** 90 million acres (the best land) was sold to white settlers, speculators or Native Americans themselves if they had the money. The policy was a failure.

**By the end of the century both disease and poverty had reduced the Native American population to 200,000, most of who lived as wards of the United States government.**

**The Ghost Dance Movement** – created as a Native American religious movement and a last ditch effort of resistance. One of their main leaders, the Sioux Medicine Man **Sitting Bull** was killed by federal troops during his arrest. From this more violence took place.

**The Battle of Wounded Knee** in the Dakotas saw Native American men, women and children gunned down by federal troops. This battle was the last of the Indian Wars on the prairies.

## **Important items of note regarding Native Americans**

It was not until **1924** that citizenship was granted to all Native Americans

In **1934** the **Indian Reorganization Act** – part of the FDR New Deal Program – reestablished tribal organizations and cultures.

Today there are approximately 18 million Native Americans living both on and off reservations. There are a total of 116 tribes each with 1,000 or more members.

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