

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: CONFLICT AND CONQUEST: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WEST, 1860–1900

READING AND STUDY GUIDE

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 - A. Congress Promotes Westward Settlement
 - B. The Diversity of the Native American West
 - C. Native American Tribes of the Great Plains
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- II. The Economic Transformation of the West
 - A. The Railroad Fuels Western Development
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Before 1840, most Americans viewed the lands west of the Mississippi as a great, untamed and dangerous wilderness of rugged terrain, extreme temperatures, wild animals, and hostile Native Americans. But beginning in the 1840s, an ever-growing number of farmers, miners, ranchers, entrepreneurs, and adventurers moved west, aided after 1869 by the completion of the transcontinental railroad and soaring demand for western products and resources.

Gast's celebratory scene reveals, doubtless unintentionally, the bitter conflict that accompanied the transformation of the West. On the painting's left border, a cluster of Native Americans flee before the advancing whites. Above them a herd of buffalo likewise make their escape. Gast's matter-of-fact portrayal of the seizure of Indian land and the near extinction of the buffalo reflected the nation's enthusiasm for "progress" and the inability—or unwillingness—to confront the human and environmental costs associated with it. By 1900, the West had been radically transformed. Great networks of railroads and telegraph lines crisscrossed the landscape, as did untold miles of fencing that marked the boundaries of millions of farms and ranches. The western landscape also featured cities like San Francisco and Denver that rivaled their eastern

counterparts. Perhaps even more remarkable than the appearance of these new aspects of western life was the disappearance of others.

By 1900, the American government had confined hundreds of independent Native American tribes that had once lived in virtually every corner of the West to a series of reservations. Gone, too, were the millions of buffalo from the plains and, in areas of intensive mining, large mountain sections of once pristine landscape. The conquest of the West between 1865 and 1900 included many stories of success, achievement, and undeniable progress, but it was far more complex, violent, and tragic than Gast's dreamy vision suggests.

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 15, students should be able to do the following:

1. Explain the extent of diversity and the degree of complexity found in Native American societies of the West during the late nineteenth century.
2. Offer examples of the American use of warfare and violence against Native Americans in an effort to seize their land.
3. Describe early Sioux successes in delaying the advance of white Americans into the far west, focusing on the Second Treaty of Fort Laramie and the Battle of Little Bighorn.
4. Comment on the involvement of Christian denominations in the effort to "Americanize" Native Americans.
5. Describe the effects of gender imbalance on the lifestyle and character of western mining camps.
6. Describe the impact of racial and ethnic diversity on the emergence of collective violence in western mining camps.
7. Describe the transformation of western mining from an individualistic pursuit into a corporate-controlled industry that was fully integrated into the national economy.
8. Explain the impact of corporate control of the mining industry on the western environment and on mining labor.
9. Compare and contrast attempts to unionize and management's attempts to prevent unionization in the industrialized East and in western mines.
10. Describe the characteristics and functions of the western cow town that emerged in the late nineteenth century.
11. Describe the transformation of open range ranching from an individualistic pursuit typified by independent ranchers to a corporate-controlled industry.

12. Explain the evolution of cowhands from seasonal employees with significant independence to wage laborers for corporate ranches.
13. Discuss the limitations of the Homestead Act of 1862 as a means of helping Americans establish their own farms in the West.
14. Explain the role of the railroad in promoting the migration of western settlers.
15. Describe the racial and ethnic diversity of the settlers who migrated westward during the late nineteenth century.
16. Describe the impact of American settlement in the West on individual land ownership by Hispanics in village communities.
17. Comment on the adversities faced by western settlers as they established homes. Discuss the unique challenges faced by women settlers in the West.
18. Describe the political, economic, and natural challenges faced by farmers in the West, and describe how they used invention, technology, and innovation to meet these challenges.
19. Discuss the impact of failed crops and declining crop prices on the livelihoods of western farmers.

Key Terms & Definitions:

trans-Mississippi West The region of the United States west of the Mississippi River. (440)

Homestead Act Passed in 1862, it provided 160 acres of free land to any settler willing to live on it and improve it for five years; promoted massive westward migration. (440)

transcontinental railroad A line spanning the continental United States. Congress helped the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads build it by providing land grants, cash incentives, and loans. (441)

Great Plains Vast open territory stretching east to west from present-day Missouri to the Rocky Mountains, and north to south from North Dakota to Texas (443)

Exodusters More than twenty thousand ex-slaves who in 1879 left violence and poverty in the South to take up farming in Kansas. (444)

Mormons A religious sect founded in upstate New York in 1830. Driven by persecution they headed west in 1846 and settled in a valley in Utah near the Great Salt Lake. (445)

Grange Originally founded in the fall of 1867 by Oliver H. Kelley as a social and educational society for farmers, it became a major political force in the Midwest in the mid-1870s. (449)

Long Drive The annual cattle drives of more than 1,000 miles from Texas to the Great Plains that started in 1866 and established the ranching industry in the West. (449)

Sand Creek Massacre A massacre of some two hundred Cheyenne Indians on November 29, 1864, in Colorado by a military outfit known as the Colorado Volunteers under Colonel John M. Chivington. (454)

Battle of Little Bighorn Lt. Col. George A. Custer and the Seventh Cavalry are wiped out by a force of Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho warriors on June 25, 1876; hardens white attitudes toward Native Americans. (456)

Dawes Severalty Act 1887 law that started the breakup of reservations by offering Native Americans allotments of 160 acres of reservation land to encourage them to become independent farmers. (458)

Wounded Knee Massacre U.S. soldiers open fire on a group of Sioux Indians on December 29, 1890, killing between two hundred and three hundred. (461)

“Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” A circuslike production begun in 1883 that helped create a romantic and mythological view of the West in the American imagination. (462)

Frontier Thesis Historian Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 theory that extolled the positive role the frontier had played in shaping the American character and consequently American institutions. (464)

Study Questions:

How did the notion of “progress” shape Americans’ vision of western settlement? (438)

What factors led to the uneven results of the Homestead Act? (440)

Why was the federal government so eager to assist the companies that built the transcontinental railroad? (441)

What was the impact of European contact with Indians in the trans-Mississippi West before 1850? (442)

What is significant about the diversity of Native American life in the trans-Mississippi West? (443)

How did the introduction of horses change the lifestyle of some Plains Indians? (444)

What motivated the many groups that participated in the great migration into the West? (445)

Why did railroads promote the migration of immigrants to the West? (446)

How did the railroad shape western economic development? (447)

What challenges did western farmers face? (448)

What aspects of the railroads did western farmers resent? (449)

How did the reality of cowboy life differ from that presented in popular culture? (450)

How was the environment of the West altered by human settlement and economic development? (451)

Why did few people heed the warnings of writers like Marsh? (452)

What did the government hope to accomplish by signing treaties with Native American tribes? (453)

How did negative stereotypes of Native Americans influence government policy? (454)

How did the dependence of the Plains Indians on the buffalo weaken their ability to resist the loss of their lands? (455)

How did the victory over Custer and his men ultimately prove very costly to the Plains Indians? (456)

Why were Native Americans so resistant to the government's demand that they settle on reservations? (457)

What led reformers like Dawes to believe the break up of reservations would be beneficial to Native Americans? (458)

What assumptions about Native American culture influenced the boarding school program? (459)

How did the Dawes Act play a key role in the loss of Native American land? (460)

What made Wovoka's message so appealing to Indians and so frightening to military officials? (461)

Why did the West become such a popular topic in entertainment literature? (462)

What traits did Annie Oakley portray to present an ideal woman of the West? (463)

How have new Western historians changed the way many Americans understand the history of the West? (464)

Why are Native Americans so committed to reshaping the interpretation of historic sites like Little Bighorn? (465)