

## Chapter 26: The Great West and the Agricultural Revolution (1865-1896)

### Chapter Synopsis

- Right after the Civil War, the West was still widely unsettled by Americans
  - There were few white people in between the 100th meridian and the settlements in California and some other areas along the Pacific coast
- People were still generally migrating towards the 100th meridian
  - The 100th meridian was defined as the Eastern border of the West, i.e., around the longitudinal center of America
- By 1890, the Americans had greatly colonized the Western area
  - They turned the West into four states (Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and Oklahoma (the “Indian Territory”))

### The Clash of Cultures on the Plains

- By 1860, there were about 360,000 Native Americans
- Many Native Americans had been displaced
  - The Apaches were driven into the Rio Grande valley region in the 1700s
  - The Cheyenne had left Mississippi and Missouri Rivers regions
  - The Sioux moved to the Great Plains region to attack other tribes
- Problems for the Native Americans worsened
  - Bison were becoming scarcer
    - Horse-mounted tribes such as the Sioux and the Cheyenne quickly killed buffalo, making them rarer
    - Whites grazed livestock on the same lands as buffalo
    - Scarcer buffalo caused more violence in the Great Plains regions as they fought for buffalo
  - Whites spread cholera amongst the Native Americans
- Federal government tried to lessen violence in the plains region by signing treaties with tribal leaders at Fort Laramie in 1851, and at Fort Atkinson in 1853
  - This formed the reservation system of the West
  - The government tried to split the Native Americans into a northern and southern tribe “colony”
  - This did not respect traditional Native American culture
    - The Native Americans had a very family-based society (without so much emphasis on tribal leaders as the Americans had thought, hence limiting the effects of the tribal leaders’ treaties)
    - The Native Americans often were roaming and followed the buffalo, and thus were not used to being confined to a defined area
- In 1860s, the reservation system was intensified by federal government
  - Native Americans were confined to smaller spaces, such as the Great Sioux Reservation in Dakota and the Indian Territory in Oklahoma

- Native Americans only gave in to federal agreements that required them to give up their land when the government provided supplies and were promised not to intervene in their lives any more
  - Unfortunately, some of the officials were corrupt and took some of the supplies
  - Usually the supplies were of low quality, such as “moth-eaten blankets, spoiled beef,” etc.
- There were fierce wars in the west after the Civil War
  - There were many army troops stationed in the West
    - ⅓ of the western troops were African American
  - The Native American tribes had great mobility and fought a tough fight against the Americans

*Migration and Settlement:* There was a general movement of the Native Americans farther west as the Americans moved west, because the latter kept on pushing the former away from its settled areas. All of the tribes east of the Mississippi were moved to federal lands designated for the Native Americans during the Indian Removal Act under President Jackson’s rule, and now all of the tribes were forced to move to even more constricted areas under the Reservation System. In the meantime, the buffalo population greatly declined and the way of life of the Native Americans degraded. This shows that forced settlement is a result of sociopolitical factors, with both political (the government’s acts) and social (the loss of buffalo and culture) able to effectively force the Native Americans into reservations. This shows a trend of all of the American attacks on Native Americans, with the original Anglo-Saxon colonists in the U.S. working to try and Christianize some of the Native Americans to try and break them down. However, with the natural process of the loss of buffalo and land, the Native Americans grew ever more weak and finally succumbed to the forced migrating and settling once their culture had collapsed.

#### Receding Native Population

- Whites often shot innocent Native Americans, and vice versa
- A Sioux war party attacked the soldiers under Captain William J. Fetterman
  - They left no survivors and brutally mutilated the dead soldiers
  - Led to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, or “Custer’s Last Stand”
    - One of the few Native American victories against the Americans
    - The U.S. army soldiers were completely wiped out
    - Victory led to government’s strict persecution of the Sioux Native Americans
- Some Nez Perce Indians, led by Chief Joseph, fled towards Canada for 1,700 miles
  - They were under the belief that they were to be returned home, but instead ended up on a Kansas reservation where many died
- Geronimo led Apache in the south, was chased into Mexico and eventually defeated and forced into reservations
- The Native Americans were greatly disadvantaged against the Americans
  - The Americans had railroads that could bring in troops and supplies quickly
  - The buffalo were almost extinct, making the Native American way of life very difficult
  - The government was very willing to enforce its land claims with military force
  - The Native Americans were weakened by American diseases

## Bellowing Herds of Bison

- Tens of millions of buffalo originally roamed America
- By the time the Civil War ended, 15 million buffalo roamed America
- Buffalo were hunted to under a thousand in total (almost to extinction) by 1885
  - Some people were employed by the railroads to shoot oncoming buffalo
  - People shot buffalo for food or for sport

*American and National Identity*: The Nativist and Manifest Destiny views of the Americans is epitomized in the conquest of the Native Americans. The Americans used brutal tactics to ruthlessly force the Native Americans off of their land, even though the Americans knew how valuable land was to a civilization. This push showed the American's determination to keep the land that they believed was theirs to themselves, as they had shown during the Revolutionary War (pushing away the British from the colonies) and with Manifest Destiny (warring with Mexico and negotiating with Britain over Oregon in order to get the Mexican Cession and the Oregon territory). And then, with the popular sentiment of nativism appearing in the 1800s with the rise of immigrant groups, the Americans' hatred for non-Americans increased. All of these traits of American identity were exemplified in their struggle against the Native Americans.

## The End of the Trail

- Some people began to sympathize with the Native Americans by the 1880s
  - Helen Hunt wrote *A Century of Dishonor* that analyzed the American mistreatment of Native Americans, and *Ramona* about a love story with Native Americans, both of which protagonized Native Americans
  - Humanitarians wanted better treatment for the Native Americans
- There was still strong support for brutal government practices against Native Americans
  - Christian reformers, for example, wanted to totally eradicate the Native American way of life and Christianize them
    - They successfully outlawed the sacred "Sun Dance" and "Ghost Dance" (at the Battle of Wounded Knee) militarily
      - The Battle of Wounded Knee involved the death of hundreds of Native American civilians simply for their religious rite of the ghost dance
- The government passed the Dawes Severalty Act (1887)
  - This supported the high government intervention and control of Native American life by dissolving all the tribes, took away tribal ownership of their land, and set up Native Americans as families with 160 acres of land that would become theirs if they settled for long enough (like in the Homestead act)
  - About 50% of Native American land was lost
    - Extra land was to be sold, profits were to go towards Native American boarding schools
  - Native American children were taken away from families and educated at boarding schools that tried to take away their culture and American-ize them
  - This was reversed with the Indian Reorganization Act (1934) half a century later

- Native American population, ravaged by war and disease, began to increase again from this time on

*Culture and Society:* Society had divided views of the Native Americans. The majority, conservative opinion was to continue the harsh restrictions on them in the reservations, and this supported the nativist view against the Native Americans [ See “American and National Identity” under “Bellowing Herds of Bison” ]. On the other hand, some of the American conscience was warming to the Native Americans. This showed the increasingly inclusive and reformist side to American culture, the same that powered the black and women’s suffrage movements and the push for black emancipation earlier, during the Civil War. Like most of the reform movements, some women were at the head of this reform movement, such as Mary Lease. While these were mostly societal changes, politics eventually caught up half a century later with the Indian Reorganization Act that reversed the Dawes Severalty Act and attempted to revitalize Native American culture and stop the rough government efforts to integrate it into American culture.

#### Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker

- Increase of railroad and decrease of Native Americans made mining in the West much more attractive
- In Colorado in 1858 and Nevada in 1859, there were many people pouring in to search for gold and other precious metals and minerals
  - Most people were poor, didn’t have major discovery
  - The Comstock Lode was a very large silver deposit that spurred mining in Nevada
- Boomtowns sprung up wherever there was a discovery
  - They became ghost towns when the mining finished
  - There was a crude “vigilante justice” sprung up from these towns without official justice systems
- The mining industry involved large businesses taking over expensive industrial processes in the mining process
  - Independent miners became simpler factory workers again for large mining companies
- Mining had given many men and women opportunity in the West
  - Women played a large part accommodating the men
    - This helped earn women the vote earlier in the West: in Wyoming in 1869, in Utah in 1870, in Colorado in 1893, and in Idaho in 1896
- Mining also helped to finance railroads, and intensified the support for silver as a national currency

#### Beef Bonanzas and the Long Drive

- Cattle became an industry in the Great Plains region
  - Railroads could transport cattle in cars for fresher meat, or move packaged meat in refrigerator cars
  - Cowboys would push cattle to railroads over the “long drive”
    - The long drive was when cowboys moved cattle from cattle-rich Texas and South upwards to a major railway terminal to be shipped away

- This eventually died off because more people began to claim land that could not be easily traversed (i.e., with fences and walls)
- Livestock owners eventually learned to fence livestock and grow meatier animals for their profit
- Cowboys were respected in American culture for their masculinity

#### The Farmers' Frontier

- Many farmers moved west because of the Homestead Act (1862)
  - Gave people 160 acres of land in return for improvement of the land, a small fee, and settling for five years
- While lands were free, often took a lot of money to survive on land
  - Focus of land giveaway was not profit for national government like before, but expansion of the image of the ideal farmer and to populate the West
- Farmers faced a tough life in the West
  - While land east of the 100th meridian was fertile, west of it was very arid
    - People still tried to farm west of that line (mostly unsuccessfully)
      - More successful methods included tough strains of wheat from Russia and more drought-resistant sorghum
    - Irrigation changed this, with massive irrigation projects for the next century making farming easier in this area
  - There was some corruption and fraud caused by companies who bought up land with the resources they wanted

*Work, Exchange, and Technology:* While the Industrial Revolution had made its main course through Europe and the Americas in the early 1800s, there was still a great streamlining of processes into industrial and mechanical ones that improved the efficiency of the American economy. Such advances happened in mining, where the dull and dangerous job of the miner was overtaken by the large corporation, whose financial needs were met by rich businessmen. Similarly, “refrigerator cars” helped the meatpacking industry and the transportation of produce, and widespread irrigation alleviated some of the problems of farming in the West. The problem with this industrialization of these jobs was that it turned them into factory-like jobs, where each worker was nameless and paid low wages and placed under the control of company bosses. An exception would be the cowboys who drove cattle up the “long drive,” but they were soon driven out of business and thus their freedom too was limited. Thus, through the improvement of technology, most work became similar in structure to that of a factory, monopolized by a few officials and manned by a vast majority of poorly-paid laborers.

#### The Far West comes of Age

- By 1890, “a frontier line was no longer discernable” — indicated the “closing of the frontier”
  - Inspired the influential essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” by Frederick Jackson Turner
- People thought that the land in the West would be inexhaustible, but it turned out to be quickly settle-able

- The government began to create National Parks to conserve some areas of the West from settlement as a result
- The frontier was a very American image, represented more than a place and played a crucial part of American history
  - It showed mobility of Americans and their value of arable land
  - It gave the Americans a “safety valve” option
    - The safety valve meant that if a depression came, the poor could easily move West and begin farming and become prosperous; supported the American Dream
    - There ended up being many people who moved West to *cities* to seek fortunes (e.g., Chicago, Denver, and San Francisco), not to farm
  - It showed the last American efforts at colonization (after that all American lands were colonized)
  - It showed the last major Native American efforts to fight against the Americans, and is where many of them still live
  - It is where many people from Asia immigrated, and where many still live
  - It shows a huge government-initiated socioeconomic change

*American and National Identity*: Manifest Destiny showed strongly in the frontier lands. It showed a movement towards expansion of land with many governmental policies (e.g., the Homestead Act, the Dawes Severalty Act, etc.), as well as the people’s strong motivation to expand and innovate, with new mining and farming jobs popping up in boomtowns all throughout the West. When the Census Bureau declared that there was no longer a discernable frontier line, which essentially meant that the U.S. could no longer colonize land and continue Manifest Destiny, they still showed how they valued land—the importance of natural land forms an integral part of Manifest Destiny—by erecting National Parks such as Yellowstone National Park and Yosemite National Park. Furthermore, with all of the jobs opening up in the West, the American Dream, another facet of American Identity, was also supported; thus, some people claim the Wild West to be the most “American” part of America because of the ideals of American identity that it contains.

#### The Farm Becomes a Factory

- The mechanization of agriculture greatly changed farming in the West
  - There was the invention of the twine blender and the combine machines that greatly increased the speed of harvesting
  - Farmers began to use cash crops like wheat or corn on a large scale in order to compete
  - Expensive industrial equipment required rich businesspeople who hired poor farmers to do the manual labor
  - Farms became enormous plantations, with “at least a half-dozen of [the Bonanza wheat farms of Minnesota] larger than fifteen thousand acres, with communication by telephone from one part to another” by 1890
  - Creation of refrigerator train car increased market and allowed profits from sale in the East

*Work, Exchange, and Technology*: [ See synthesis under “The Farmers’ Frontier” ]

## Deflation Dooms the Debtor

- High grain output around the world and by the mechanized agriculture of the West drove prices of grain down, causing deflation
  - Deflation is when each dollar is worth more (prices are low and more can be bought for the dollar)
    - This is hard on the debtor or renter, who has to pay back a higher value than they borrowed
    - This was partially caused by the lack of money going around; there wasn't enough currency for everyone, especially with the economic boom of the factories and farms
  - Continued high rates of farming and lowered price worsened the deflationary effects throughout the 1870s and 1880s
  - This led to high interest rates of 8-40%

## Unhappy Farmers

- Farmers in the West had many grievances
  - There were destructive grasshopper/locust crowds
  - Floods worsened the topsoil erosion that had happened when cultivating on dry soil
  - Fertilizers were expensive
  - Government had high taxes on their land
  - The protective tariff, while protecting the Eastern manufacturers, offered no protection to them in the competitive world market and forced them to buy expensive foreign goods
  - Trusts controlled many of their products, and the railroad trust controlled their manufacturing
- Hardships of farmers led to entire Western towns to be abandoned sometimes
- Farmers were an unorganized group, but they made up 1/2 of the population in 1890

*Geography and the Environment:* Geographical problems were the root of the problems for the farmers of the West. First of all, the land was arid, and the initial farming made the topsoil easily flake off, creating bad farmland and leading to the violent dust storms of the Dust Bowl. Floods worsened this. There were also swarms of locusts that could attack at any time, and to prevent this would require expensive fertilizer. The "environment" for the farmer also uncontrollable factors like the monopolies that controlled the manufacture of their equipment and transportation of their products, which also was problematic for them because trusts could easily manipulate prices and make a farmer's profit very low.

## The Farmers Take Their Stand

- The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry (the "Grange") formed in 1867
  - It was led by Oliver H. Kelley, whose first initiative was to improve the poor and isolated lives of farmers
    - He organized social activities such as picnics, which boosted the farmers' morale

- He was a Mason and made the Grange a bit of a secret society for farmers, which appealed to the farmers
- The Grange became very popular, had 800,000 members by 1875
- Goal of the Grange moved from “self-improvement to improvement of the farmers’ collective plight”
  - They established jointly-owned warehouses and machinery
  - They even tried to create machinery (to bypass heavy costs of buying from factories) but failed
- The Grangers even went into politics, trying to regulate the railroads and other businesses that monopolized farming— these were the “Granger Laws”
  - They held popular stances, but many of the Granger Laws were not well-written and could not compete with the highly-paid lawyers from the trusts they were against
  - The *Wabash* Supreme Court Case limited state intervention in railroad affairs, thus limiting the state-level control the Grangers had
  - The Grangers backed the Greenback Labor party that supported inflationary practices
    - The Greenbacks supported presidential candidate General James B. Weaver, a Granger and Greenback; however, he did not do well in the election, with only 3% of the popular vote

#### Prelude to Populism

- The farmers founded the Farmer’s Alliance in the late 1870s
  - They attempted to lessen the control of railroads on their businesses
  - Its downfall was caused by its lack of black members, who composed about half of the Southern farmers
    - African American farmers formed the Colored Farmers’ National Alliance in the 1880s, but when the two organizations were separate they weren’t very powerful
- The farmers formed the People’s Party, or the Populists, in the 1890s
  - They called for much reform: nationalizing the railroads, telephone, and telegraph; instituting a graduated income tax; and creating a new federal ‘subtreasury’ — a scheme to provide farmers with loans for crops stored in government-owned warehouses, where they could be held until market prices rose,” as well as the coinage of silver
    - Free coinage of silver was one of its strongest arguments, because it would cause inflation and help many of the debtor and tenant farmers who suffered financially from deflation
  - The Populists had taken several seats in Congress and polled over a million votes for their presidential candidate James B. Weaver

#### Coxey’s Army and the Pullman Strike

- There was the Panic of 1893 that caused increased support for the poor farmers that made up the Populists and strengthened their argument that large businesses and the governments were suppressing them



- Jacob S. Coxey demanded “that the government relieve unemployment by an inflationary public works program, supported by some \$500 million in legal tender notes to be issued by the Treasury”
  - He led an “army” of a few supporters into Washington D.C., but was arrested and stopped quickly
- Eugene V. Debs organized the American Railway Union, which had 150,000 members
  - The Pullman Palace Car company cut wages during the depressions but kept the same rent for company houses
  - The works struck in the Pullman strike (1894), which paralyzed the railways from Chicago to California
    - This was not supported by the American Federation of Labor because of its lack of “respectability”
    - Conservatives and President Cleveland believed that this railroad strike hurt the postal service, demanded that it be broken up to restore mail service
- There was increased conflict after the Pullman strike between workers and large businesses and government
  - Organized labor cried that the government was “government by injunction,” or one by legal restriction, in which workers could be imprisoned without a trial (unconstitutional)
  - Employers also used courts to try to take down labor unions, showed again legal action against the common, poor people

*American and National Identity:* From the beginning of America, there was always the tendency to fight against injustice, especially the poor against the rich. The farmers are Americans again in the poor who have to fight against the rich and bully-like monopolistic trusts, such as in Coxey’s march or the Pullman strike. However, in both of these instances the government and a great part of the people were pro-business and allowed the large companies to keep their power, instead thrusting away the poor people. The government justified their actions by claiming that the strikers were disrupting national business, including by trespassing (for which Coxey was arrested) and for disrupting the postal service, for which the Pullman strike was stopped. However superfluous the acts for which these two strikes were charged for, it showed that the American government has a duty to stop any disturbance of the peace such as a strike, even if it is with good intent; it shows the ability inherent in American identity to think dynamically and prioritize the security over the nation over violence for a small issue.

#### Golden McKinley and Silver Bryan

- The issue of whether to introduce inflationary or deflationary policy was a large factor in determining the winner of the 1896 presidential election
  - The Republican presidential candidate was William McKinley, strongly supported business
    - He believed in “trickle down” economics, in which prosperity from big business would also make the laborers within less wealthy
    - Strongly guided into the pro-business stance by Marcus Alonzo Hanna, who was in the iron business
    - He supported the tariff and the gold standard

- The Democrats chose William Jennings Bryan as their presidential candidate
  - President Cleveland was not the candidate because he had acted pro-business in the Pullman strike, which made him seem like a Republican
  - Bryan appeared to people as a very honest and sincere person
  - He gave the “Cross of Gold” speech that showed his support for silver and saying that the gold standard was suppressing the poor people; it was a very influential speech
  - Bryan caused the fusion of the Democratic and Populist parties by incorporating the silver standard idea of the Populists into the Democratic agenda

#### Class Conflict: Plowholders Versus Bondholders

- Mark Hanna and the Republicans tried to make tariffs the main issue, but Bryan tried to make free trade the main issue
  - Both candidates caused fervent supporters in the East (Republican) and West (Democrats), with mudslinging as usual but also threats such as pro-Republican employers threatening to pay workers in the unlikely idea of silver half-dollars if Bryan won
- The Republicans raised \$16 million in election funds, while the Democrats raised \$1 million; some Democrats claimed that the Republicans had bought their way into the presidency
- Republicans under President McKinley won the presidential election of 1896, with 271 electoral votes to 176
  - Bryan had great appeal to the mortgaged farmers, but not to unmortgaged farmers or factory laborers in the East, who were not in debt and therefore were not so negatively influenced by the gold standard and by deflation
  - This was a major victory for pro-business advocates and industrial cities
  - This was the beginning of the fourth party system with a high voter turnout and political zeal, the “third party system” being the less fervent political era between the Civil War and the 1890s

#### Republican Stand-pattism Enthroned

- President McKinley was a cautious man who usually stayed with the popular opinion, while keeping to his pro-business stance
  - Trusts gained more power under him
- The issue of the tariffs quickly became the most important issue in 1897
  - The Democratic Wilson-Gorman Act had tariff rates that were too low
  - A new bill was passed, with over 850 amendments (showing the great deliberation over the bill), that had higher rates of tariffs than the Wilson-Gorman Act and even rates that were in some places higher than the McKinley Act of 1890
- Farm prices rose after the depression of 1893, decreasing deflation and allowing the economy to prosper again
  - The money issue over deflation faded away

- Inflation continued to rise as more foreign gold was discovered and cheaper extraction processes were discovered, which lessened the need for inflationary actions by government
- The Gold Standard Act (1900) “provided that paper currency be redeemed freely in gold”

*Politics and Power:* The presidential election of 1896 was almost completely dependent on the clash over whether or not to introduce deflationary or inflationary acts by the government. Both presidential candidates were very passionate on their side of the issue (Bryan for silver coinage and McKinley against). In the end, this highly controversial issue attracted many people to the polls, leading to the “fourth party system” of great voter turnouts. Although deflation decreased and the issue faded away rather quickly into McKinley’s term, it still shows how politics is so easily divided and roused up by a single issue, and how American political elections is based on these divided issues. This again supports the idea of a democracy and a two-party system by showing that a nation is most politically active (high voter turnout, which is necessary to gain an accurate citizen opinion) if there is controversy in its politics and a choice of party for the people to choose from.