

CHAPTER 12

The Last Frontier, Farmers, and Politics

At the end of the Civil War, one large part of the United States was still largely unsettled. This was the area between the Missouri River and the settlements in California, the Northwest, and the Southwest. Stretching more than 1,500 miles from east to west, the territory comprised two main regions. One, the Great Plains, lay between the Missouri and the Rockies. It was a dry, almost treeless expanse of land, covered with fields of high grass. The other region, west of the plains, included the Rocky Mountains and the arid plateaus beyond them.

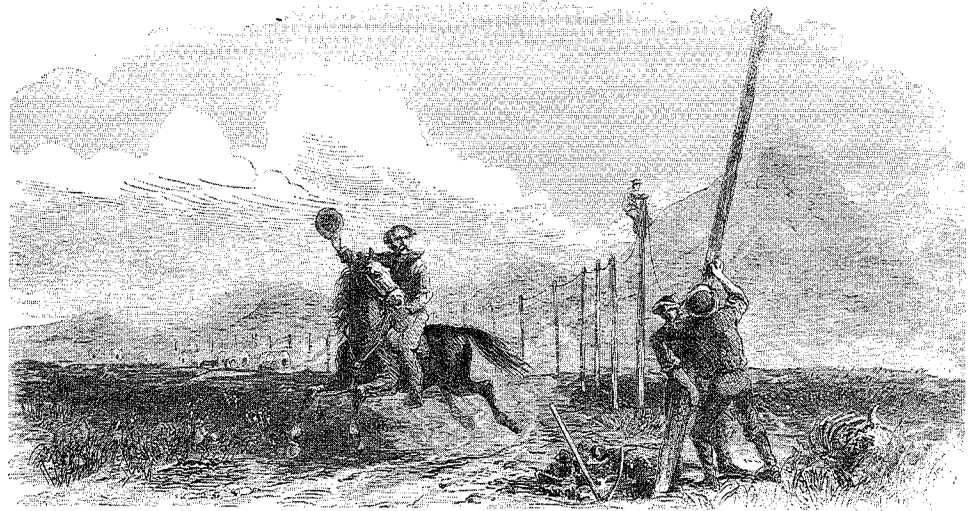
In the 1860s, this huge territory was inhabited chiefly by Native Americans. But by 1900, many thousands of newcomers had settled there. Settlement of the "last frontier" was one of several developments that transformed the United States in the late 1800s.

MINES, TRAILS, AND RAILS

Lewis and Clark and other explorers had visited this area in the early 1800s. Fur traders and pioneers on their way to the Pacific Coast soon followed. Most of these visitors considered the area incapable of supporting civilized settlement. Beginning in the 1850s, however, attitudes changed.

1. The Lure of Wealth. The California gold rush of 1849 was the first of many mineral strikes. In the 1850s, gold was discovered near Pikes Peak, Colorado, and gold and silver in Nevada. In the 1860s, gold was found also in Idaho and Montana. Later, rich strikes were made in the Black Hills of South Dakota, in Arizona, and in Alaska. Miners and prospectors rushed to the mining sites and set up makeshift towns. Many of the ore deposits found were very valuable. At Virginia City, Nevada, the Comstock Lode alone yielded \$300 million in gold and silver in 20 years.

Life in the mining camps was rough and lawless at first. Citizens formed local governments and organized groups of vigilantes to track down and punish lawbreakers. Some prospectors who failed to strike it rich settled down to ranching and farming. Others drifted



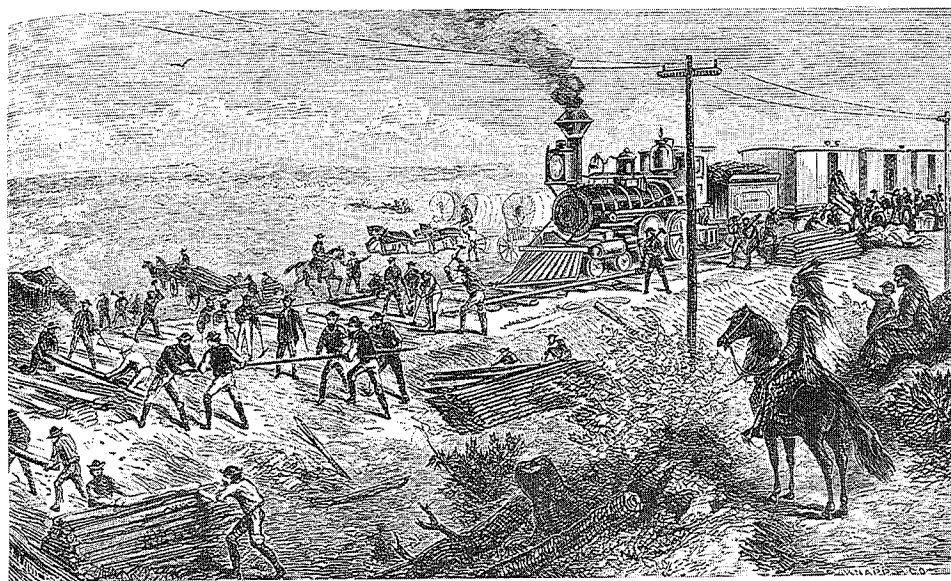
A Pony Express rider passed workers raising telegraph poles in the 1860s.

away or took jobs with mining companies. These mining companies replaced individual prospectors because mining below the surface required large amounts of money to sink shafts, dig tunnels, and buy machinery. Besides gold and silver, the companies found copper, lead, zinc, and other minerals.

2. Early Transportation and Communication. One of the first means of reaching the West was a *stagecoach* line called the Butterfield Overland Mail. Beginning in 1858, it carried mail and passengers from St. Louis, Missouri, to Los Angeles and San Francisco. The trip took at least three weeks.

To speed up mail delivery, a group of investors founded the Pony Express in 1860. Relays of riders traveled a central route from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. Mounted on swift horses, Pony Express riders could carry mail from Missouri to California in ten days. But a new form of communication, the telegraph, was rapidly taking over. Lines to carry telegraph messages already linked most cities in the East. With the completion in October 1861 of the first telegraph line to the Far West, the Pony Express ceased operations.

3. Railroad Links. During the Civil War, the government licensed two railroad companies to build the first *transcontinental railroad*. (It did not actually cross the entire continent, but linked the Pacific coast with eastern lines already in place.) The government offered good terms to the companies: a free right-of-way across public land,



Many immigrants were hired to work laying the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad.

financial assistance in the form of loans, and large grants of land for every mile of completed track.

One of the companies, the Union Pacific, began construction at Omaha and built westward across the Nebraska prairie into Wyoming and Utah. The other company, the Central Pacific, started at Sacramento and advanced eastward across the mountains into Utah. In May 1869, the two railroads met at Promontory Point, near Ogden, Utah. Finished goods could now be shipped by rail to Western markets. Moreover, Western raw materials and farm products could be sent eastward. The mineral and forest resources of the West were opened to development, and Western settlement was made easier.

Other railroads also built lines west. By the 1890s, they included the Great Northern; the Northern Pacific; the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe; and the Southern Pacific. The government encouraged the building of these transcontinental links by granting the companies some \$60 million in loans and more than 150 million acres of public land. The railroads could sell much of this land to settlers.

THE CATTLE FRONTIER

Western railroads not only aided mining and forestry but also made large-scale cattle ranching practical. The first American settlers in Texas found huge herds of half-wild long-horned cattle. Originally brought to America by the Spaniards, these longhorns grazed freely

over the *open range*—unfenced, unsettled grassland owned by the federal government. Texans established ranches and raised the long-horns for beef, hides, and *tallow* (rendered fat used in soap, candles, and lubricants). But the industry was a local one because of the difficulty of transporting cattle to Eastern markets.

In the 1860s, when railroads were extended into Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado, Texas cattle raisers drove their animals north to rail centers and loaded them onto railroad cars for shipment to Eastern cities. In the 1870s, the introduction of the refrigerator car made it unnecessary to send live cattle halfway across the country. They could now be slaughtered in meatpacking centers, such as Kansas City and Chicago. From there, butchered beef could be sent to distant markets without spoiling.

During the 1870s and early 1880s, ranchers owned enormous herds of cattle. Each spring, cowboys chose the animals to be sold. They then herded these on the “long drive” north to “cow towns” along the rail lines. One favorite route was the Chisholm Trail, from San Antonio, Texas, to Abilene, Kansas. Another, the Western Trail, ended at Ogallala, Nebraska.

Ranching soon spread from Texas to other parts of the Great Plains. With the introduction of sheep into the plains, many areas of grassland became overgrazed. Conflicts between cattle ranchers and sheep owners led to a number of “range wars.” The open range itself grew smaller as thousands of acres were sold to farmers. Worst of all, two terrible winters in the mid-1880s brought blizzards that killed thousands of cattle. By 1890, the era of the open range was over. Although cattle raising continued to be a big industry in the West, it was generally confined to fenced ranches in dry areas unsuited to farming.

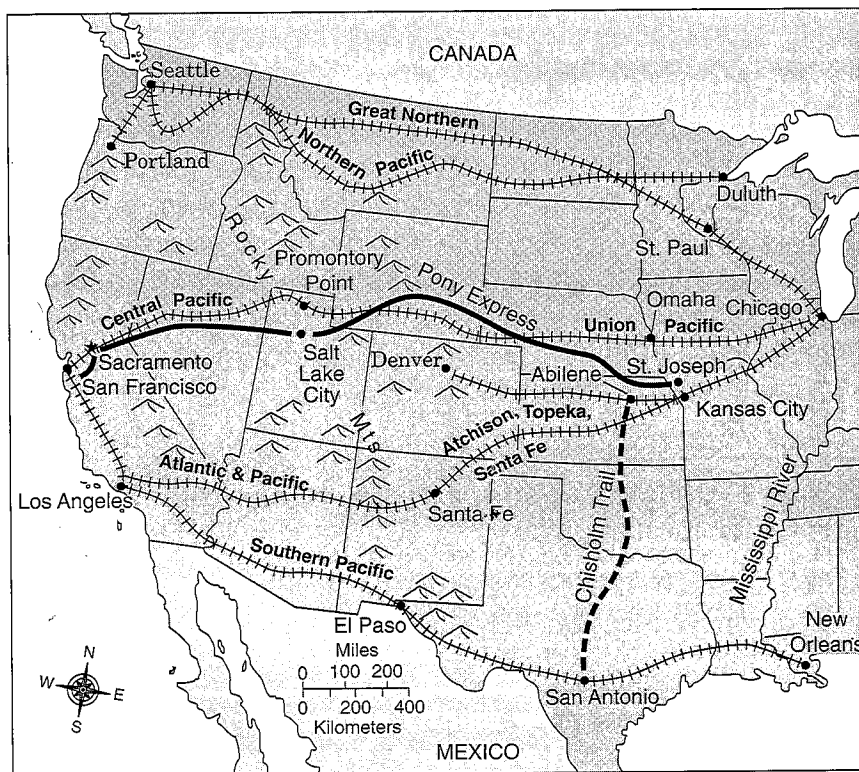
FARMERS ON THE PLAINS

The largest group of newcomers to the last frontier were farmers. They settled mainly on the Great Plains. Many of them were Easterners and Midwesterners looking for a new start. Freedmen headed west, too, as did numerous Civil War veterans. And a large number of the new settlers were immigrants, especially Scandinavians.

The Homestead Act of 1862 gave settlers 160 acres of public land. In return, the settlers paid a small fee and promised to live on the land and work it for five years. Only about 20 percent of the farm families, however, were actually homesteaders. Most of the new

READING A MAP

The West and the Railroads



1. Name the eastern and western terminals of the Pony Express.
2. Name the location where the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads were linked in 1869.
3. Name the railroad that originated in New Orleans and serviced the southernmost section of Western United States.
4. What railroads were built to serve the band of states extending from Minnesota west to Seattle?
5. Name the route followed by Texas cowboys on their long drives north to Abilene, Kansas.
6. What railroad connected Santa Fe and Kansas City?

settlers bought land from railroads or from speculators who had obtained large tracts of homestead land illegally.

Winters on the Great Plains were bitter cold, and summers were extremely hot and dry. Few trees grew there, and underground water ran far below the surface. The pioneers built houses out of *sod* (chunks of earth), or they dug caves into hillsides. They burned dried cornstalks, corncobs, and animal dung for fuel. And they dug wells to a depth of 200 feet or more to obtain water.

Several techniques aided plains farmers. One was *dry farming*—plowing and planting in ways that conserved moisture. Another was using windmills to pump water from deep within the earth. A third was using barbed-wire fencing to keep out stray cattle and sheep. Barbed wire was first marketed in 1874. But no one could do much about dust storms, blizzards, and swarms of grasshoppers. Nor could anyone predict droughts. A series of dry years in the late 1880s forced many farm families off the land.

IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: stagecoach, refrigerator car, long drive, range war, Homestead Act.

CRITICAL THINKING: Explain how developments in transportation and communication helped open the “last frontier” to settlement.

TRAGEDY FOR NATIVE AMERICANS

Ever since the arrival of Europeans along the Atlantic coast of North America, Native Americans had been pushed westward. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced many Eastern groups to move west of the Mississippi. Most of present-day Oklahoma then became Indian Territory, reserved for the Five Civilized Tribes. Because these tribes sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War, the western half of the region was taken away from them and reserved for other Eastern tribes. In addition, huge tracts in the Dakotas, Wyoming, Montana, and elsewhere were set aside for Plains and other Western tribes. As miners, ranchers, and farmers moved West in the 1860s and 1870s, more conflicts with Native-American groups developed.

The federal government tried to ease tensions by setting aside *reservations* for Native Americans to live on. Some Native-American groups, no longer able to support themselves by hunting buffalo,



In the lava beds in northern California, Modoc people fought U.S. troops in 1873, inflicting heavy casualties on their attackers. The Modoc held off the U.S. troops for three months before finally surrendering. Earlier, the Modoc had been sent to a reservation in Oregon, but they did not like it there and had returned.

agreed to move to reservations. Others were forced to. With the extension of railroads westward, Americans from the East headed for the Great Plains to shoot buffalo. They killed thousands of these animals for their hides, leaving the carcasses to rot. In 1850, there had been some 20 million buffalo on the plains. By 1889, there were fewer than a thousand left.

1. Resistance to the Newcomers. Many Native-American groups, however, rebelled against being removed from their homes. The following episodes are just a few examples of the many conflicts between U.S. troops and Native Americans. In the summer of 1877, a group of Nez Percé under Chief Joseph refused to leave Oregon for a reservation in Idaho. Pursued by U.S. troops, they fled hundreds of miles toward safety in Canada. By late September, the Nez Percé had almost reached their goal. But many were hungry and sick, and the winter had begun. After a pitched battle early in October, Chief Joseph and his people surrendered. He and his band were then confined to a reservation far from their homeland.

The Sioux also resisted relocation. One group had been promised the Black Hills of South Dakota as a permanent hunting ground.

But when gold was discovered there in the 1870s, the promise was broken. Two Sioux leaders, "medicine man" Sitting Bull and war chief Crazy Horse, led armed resistance against the newcomers. U.S. troops then set out after the Sioux. In 1876, at the Little Bighorn River in Montana, the Sioux and Cheyenne completely destroyed a force under General George A. Custer. In the long run, however, the Native Americans were no match for the U.S. Army. Band by band, they gave up and moved to reservations.

In the 1880s, many Sioux turned to a new religion called the "Ghost Dance." It promised to end the rule of their enemies and to restore their freedom and way of life. Believers gathered to perform a dance that they thought put them in touch with their ancestors. Federal authorities feared that the new faith would lead to a Sioux uprising. They blamed Sitting Bull for the rapid spread of the Ghost Dance and sent an army unit to his reservation to arrest him in December 1890. In the confusion that followed, Sitting Bull was killed.

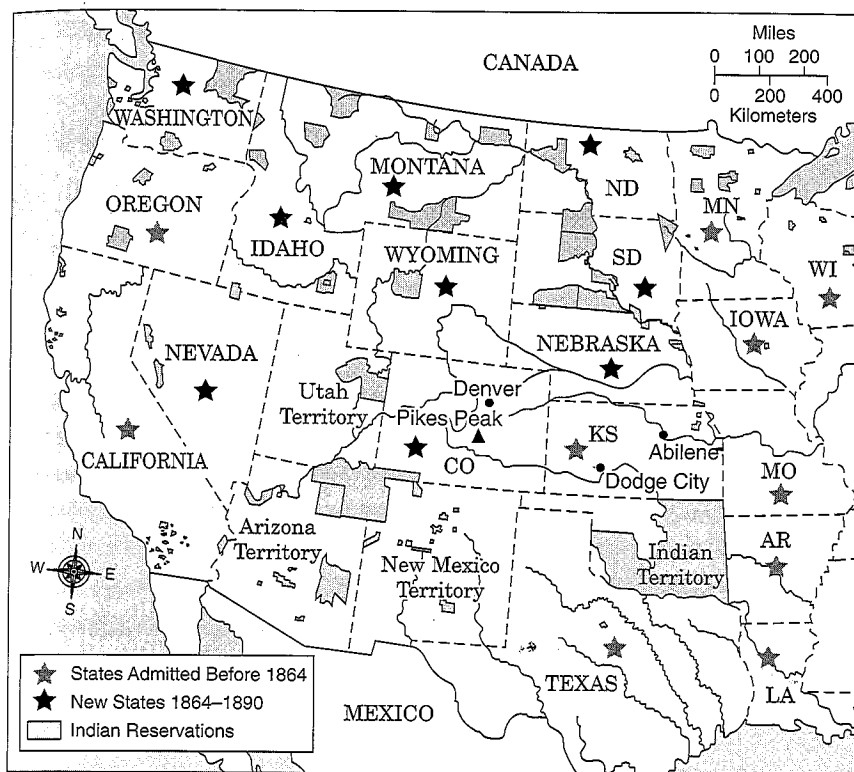
Fearing more violence, hundreds of Sioux fled the reservation, going to the Badlands area of South Dakota. The U.S. Cavalry went after them. The opposing forces met at Wounded Knee Creek on December 28. The next day, while the Sioux were being disarmed, fighting broke out. At least 250 Sioux—many of them women and children—were killed, as were some 25 of the cavalry. Wounded Knee was the last major incident in Native-American–U.S. Army conflicts.

2. Reservation Life. Life for Native Americans on reservations was demoralizing. With their traditional way of life no longer available to them, they lived mainly on government handouts. Non-native officials of the federal government ran the reservations. Many of them pocketed funds meant for the Native Americans.

In her book *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), Helen Hunt Jackson recounted how Native Americans had suffered for years from broken promises, cheating, and ill treatment. Public criticism of the government's policy led to the passage of the Dawes Act in 1887. It granted 160 acres of land to the head of each Native-American family. This land came out of former tribal holdings. What was left over was to be sold to non-Native Americans. The government hoped to encourage Native Americans to give up tribal culture and to support themselves by farming or ranching.

Unfortunately, much of the land granted to the Native Americans was not suitable for such purposes. In any case, many Native Americans regarded farming and ranching as unworthy of warriors. Thousands of them rented or sold their land to settlers for cash. When the money was gone, the Native Americans were worse off than before. Many succumbed to poverty, disease, alcoholism, and suicide.

New States and Native-American Reservations, 1864–1890



IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: reservation, Chief Joseph, George A. Custer, Sitting Bull, Wounded Knee.

CRITICAL THINKING: Why did the government pass the Dawes Act? What happened to Native Americans after its passage?

POLITICS AND PROTESTS

In 1890, the Census Bureau announced that unsettled areas of the United States had been “so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line.” In other words, the frontier no longer existed, at least officially. An era had come to an end.

Western settlement, industrialization, and the growth of cities created a number of new problems, but politicians did little to solve them. Congress, for example, largely ignored the growing power of corporations and political corruption. Segments of the population began to demand reform, however, and their influence led to some improvements in the 1880s and early 1890s.

The presidents during the late 19th century were not dynamic leaders. But even if they had wanted to effect sweeping changes, they would have met resistance. During Reconstruction, Congress had limited the power of the president and continued to overshadow the executive branch.

Although Congress was powerful, it was not respected. The Senate was called a "rich man's club." Many members of the House of Representatives ignored the proceedings and spent their time reading newspapers and answering letters. Some legislators accepted bribes from business groups in return for supporting bills favored by these groups.

1. The Role of Government. Most Americans in the late 19th century believed in *laissez-faire*. They felt that the government should not regulate the economy or provide financial help to people in need. Grover Cleveland, the only Democratic president of this period, once vetoed a bill intended to help farmers hurt by drought. His comment summed up a common attitude: "Though the people support the government, the government should not support the people."

2. Party Politics. During the late 1800s, both the Republican and Democratic parties were conservative. Both adhered to the theory of *laissez-faire* economics and employed the spoils system. Despite these similarities, Americans generally gave their loyalty and support to one of the parties. The percentage of eligible voters who voted in national elections was always more than 70 percent (sometimes higher than 80 percent). In the 20th century, the average fell below 60 percent.

Though the two parties had about equal strength nationally, each was stronger in certain regions than in others. In the "solid South," where Republicans were associated with Reconstruction, almost all white voters were Democrats. African Americans in the South were largely pro-Republican, but they were discouraged from voting. In New England and some Plains states, most voters were Republicans. Party strength was more evenly divided in the Middle Atlantic and Midwestern states. Campaigners for national office, therefore, made their major appeals in these regions. In the period from 1868 to 1896, almost all presidential candidates came from these key areas.

The two parties also appealed to different groups of voters. Most native-born white Protestants (except in the South) tended to identify themselves as Republicans. Most immigrants, especially Jews and Roman Catholics, joined the Democratic party.

A SPECIAL CASE: THE SOUTH

The South's economy and racial makeup made it different politically from the rest of the country.

1. Economic Development. After the Civil War, many Southerners felt that their economy relied too heavily on cotton and did not have enough industries. Farmers began to plant a variety of crops. Such industries as lumbering, mining, tobacco processing, and steel production began to expand. Since the South had raw cotton, a good supply of cheap labor, low taxes, and abundant waterpower, it was a good region in which to open cotton textile factories. Many New England textile mills moved to the South.

Southern leaders felt that these agricultural and industrial developments had created a "New South." But the South still lagged behind other U.S. regions economically and industrially. In fact, it actually had a smaller percentage of the nation's factories in 1900 than it had had in 1860.

After the Civil War, most big plantations were divided into small farms that were rented to landless farmers, many of whom were freedmen. The majority of tenants who worked these farms lacked the cash to rent the land, housing, and barns, or to buy seeds and tools. They therefore paid for these things with a share of the crop. This practice was called *sharecropping*.

Since landowners wanted crops that would bring them the highest profit, dependence on cotton persisted in the South despite efforts to diversify. If it is not rotated with other crops, cotton wears out the soil. In the rush for profits, landowners did not practice crop rotation. As a result, the land yielded less and less. Sharecroppers could rarely pay off their debts and have enough money to live on. Since they always owed money to their landlords, they were not free to leave the land and try something else.

2. Racial Discrimination. During Reconstruction, the federal government had taken steps to protect the rights of Southern African Americans, especially their right to vote. With the end of Reconstruction in 1877, there had been an informal agreement that the

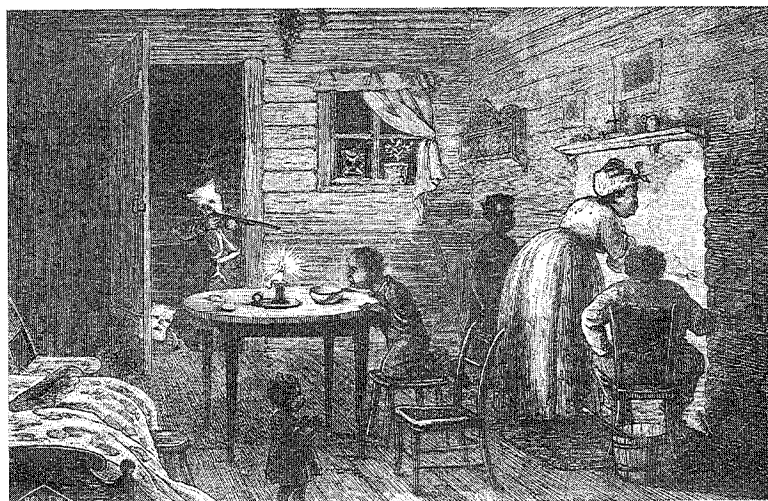
federal government would interfere less in Southern affairs. Southern African Americans were greatly harmed by this policy.

a. Jim Crow laws. Measures such as the 1866 Civil Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment did little to alter racism in either the South or the North. After Reconstruction, Southern states were determined to keep African Americans subordinate to whites. They passed laws to maintain *segregation* (separation of the races). These were called “Jim Crow laws” after a character in a popular minstrel song. The first Jim Crow laws were passed in the 1870s. They eventually imposed segregation in almost every social situation. Marriage between African Americans and whites was forbidden. Laws required separate schools, hospital facilities, and railroad accommodations for each race. Segregation was also the rule in hotels, restaurants, parks, theaters, and cemeteries.

When African Americans protested this discrimination, the courts ruled against them. In 1883, in the five so-called “Civil Rights cases,” the Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment protected people against discrimination by states but not by individuals. This meant that the federal government could not intervene if, for example, a theater owner made African-American patrons sit in the balcony. A landmark decision of 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, legitimized segregation. At issue was a state law that required separate accommodations for African Americans on railroads. The Supreme Court ruled that segregated facilities were legal if they were equal in quality. This ruling became known as the “separate but equal” doctrine. In reality, facilities for African Americans were almost always inferior to those for whites.

b. Disfranchisement. Southern whites also took steps to limit the political rights of African Americans. This limitation had not seemed necessary when Reconstruction first came to an end. Most white Southerners were willing to allow African Americans to vote, as long as they voted in support of white interests. White landlords used their economic power over their black sharecroppers to influence their voting. Force was also used at times.

By the 1890s, many African-American men threatened to vote in their own interests. Southern whites set out to *disfranchise* African Americans altogether—that is, to strip them of the vote. States used a number of methods to bypass the Fifteenth Amendment, which guaranteed all citizens the right to vote. As a requirement to vote, some localities imposed heavy *poll taxes* or set high property qualifications. Others required difficult *literacy tests*—memorizing or explaining the state constitution, for instance.



Ku Klux Klan aiming to shoot a black family in their cabin, 1870s. Violence or the threat of violence was another measure used by some Southern whites to control the behavior of African Americans.

Such measures, however, kept many whites from voting, too. A number of states, therefore, resorted to the so-called *grandfather clause*. This provision canceled other voting restrictions if the voter, his father, or his grandfather had been eligible to vote in 1867. Since Southern African Americans had not had the franchise then, only whites could make use of this clause. Statistics from Louisiana show how effective these policies were. Before the state adopted a grandfather clause, 130,344 African Americans had been registered to vote. Two years later, the number had been reduced to 5,320.

IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: segregation, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, poll tax, literacy test, grandfather clause.

CRITICAL THINKING: How did the sharecropping system affect the South?

REFORMS AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Political leaders in the late 1800s were not very interested in reform. But public pressure brought about some changes.

1. Civil Service Reform. The spoils system of rewarding faithful party members had been in effect since the early 19th century. After the Civil War, more government jobs began to require special skills. Reformers argued that government jobs should be awarded on the basis of merit rather than political connections. They wanted a *civil service*—a system of hiring government employees by means of competitive examinations.

a. Hayes. President Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, had pledged his support for a civil service when he was inaugurated in 1877. He appointed a leading reformer, Carl Schurz, as his secretary of the interior. Schurz filled jobs in his department on a merit basis, and so did some other Cabinet officers. In addition, Hayes issued an executive order—widely ignored—prohibiting federal officeholders from taking part in political activities. The Hayes administration also began a reform of the U.S. Customs (the agency that collects import duties) office in New York City. At that time, corrupt political machines controlled Customs.

b. Garfield and Arthur. In the 1880 presidential election, the winners were both Republicans—James A. Garfield as president and Chester A. Arthur as vice president. Garfield favored a civil service. After only four months in office, however, he was fatally shot by a mentally deranged politician who had failed to obtain a government job in the new administration.

None of the reformers expected much from Arthur. As a New York-based custom official, he had been fired during the Hayes administration's cleanup. But Arthur, outraged by the attack on Garfield, pushed for change. In 1883, Congress passed the Pendleton Act. It had three main provisions: (1) Competitive examinations were to be used to hire workers for government jobs placed on a classified civil service list. (2) A Civil Service Commission was to draw up and give the exams. (3) Dismissal of federal employees for political reasons was forbidden. Only about 10 percent of the existing federal jobs were covered by the Pendleton Act, but more were added in the years that followed. By 1900, about 40 percent of federal jobs were filled on the basis of competitive tests.

c. Tariffs. Northern manufacturers favored high tariffs to protect U.S. industry from foreign competition. Since most Southerners bought imported goods from abroad, they wanted lower tariffs. During the Civil War, when the Southern states were not represented in Congress, the legislature adopted the highest tariff ever imposed.

For the next 40 years, the government followed a policy of *protectionism*—maintaining high protective tariffs. The policy suited

U.S. business interests, which were very powerful at the time. Both political parties favored protectionism, although Republicans supported it more vigorously than Democrats. Although protective tariffs meant that ordinary citizens had to pay higher prices for both domestic and imported goods, they believed that barriers to foreign imports kept their wages up.

President Grover Cleveland, the Democratic winner of the election of 1884, wanted a more moderate tariff. His main reason was that revenues from high tariffs had caused a surplus in the federal treasury. This not only kept money out of circulation but also tempted members of Congress to appropriate funds for pet projects. But Cleveland could not get a tariff reform bill through Congress. The tariff issue became the deciding factor in the next presidential election.

In 1888, Cleveland ran against Republican Benjamin Harrison. Harrison, a high-tariff supporter, won the election. Two years later, Congress passed the McKinley Tariff, which raised import duties to a new high. Since these rates drove up the cost of manufactured goods, consumers protested. In the 1892 election, Cleveland defeated Harrison, largely because of the unpopular tariff. Again, he tried to lower tariffs. But the bill that Congress passed—the Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894—reduced rates only slightly. Protectionism continued to prevail.

2. Business Regulation. Meanwhile, the government turned its attention to the massive power of big business.

a. Farmers' concerns. Because farm output expanded greatly after 1865, prices of farm produce fell. At the same time, the cost of manufactured goods and machinery remained high. Farmers also had to pay high fees to the owners of grain-storage elevators, to the dealers who marketed their crops, and to the railroads that shipped them. Farmers often borrowed heavily by mortgaging their farms. The many who failed to meet high interest payments on these loans lost their land through a legal procedure known as *foreclosure*.

To make their voices heard, farmers joined a national farmers' organization called the Grange. Founded in 1867 by Oliver H. Kelley, the Grange spread rapidly, particularly in the upper Mississippi Valley. By 1875, total membership exceeded 800,000.

The original aim of the Grange was to bring farm families together for social and cultural activities. In response to farmers' need for economic help, the Grange founded cooperatives. (A *cooperative*, or *co-op*, is a business owned and operated by those who benefit from its services. These groups market, produce, store grain, buy supplies and equipment, and manufacture machinery.) The cooperatives



The Grange attempts to alert an indifferent public to the threat of railroad monopolies.

failed because big business opposed them and many farmers lacked management skills or adequate capital.

The Grangers also involved themselves in politics as a way to fight abuses by railroads. In the late 19th century, railroads charged high rates to farmers and other small-scale shippers. In most cases, the rates were higher for short hauls in areas not served by other lines than for long hauls in competitive territory. The railroads also commonly granted *rebates* (refunds) to large shippers. In Illinois and several other Midwestern states, the Grangers influenced legislatures to pass laws regulating railroad freight rates. The constitutionality of these Granger Laws was then questioned. The Supreme Court upheld the laws in 1877 (*Munn v. Illinois*) and then reversed itself in 1886 (the *Wabash Railroad* case). In the later decision, the Court held that only the federal government, not the states, could regulate interstate commerce.

Farm groups then turned to the federal government for help. Congress responded in 1887 by passing the Interstate Commerce Act. It provided that railroad rates should be "reasonable and just."

It banned such practices as rebates and differing rates for short and long hauls. It also created the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), the nation's first regulatory agency, to carry out the law's provisions. At first, the railroads found several ways to get around the Interstate Commerce Act. Later, the law became more effective.

b. An antitrust law. Some Americans began to point out that the trusts' controlling many industries stifled competition, the lifeblood of free enterprise. Both political parties officially favored some regulation of trusts. As in the case of railroad reform, individual states tried to act, but without much success. Since monopolies operated interstate, it became apparent that only the federal government had the power to restrain them.

In 1890, Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act. It made illegal every "combination in the form of trust . . . in restraint of trade or commerce." But the Sherman Act, like the Interstate Commerce Act, had little effect at first. Presidents at that time did not enforce it. And businesses easily found loopholes in it. In the last decade of the 19th century, the act was used mainly as a weapon against labor unions.

IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: civil service, protectionism, the Grange, cooperative, rebate, antitrust law.

CRITICAL THINKING: Why was the Sherman Antitrust Act passed? How was it abused?

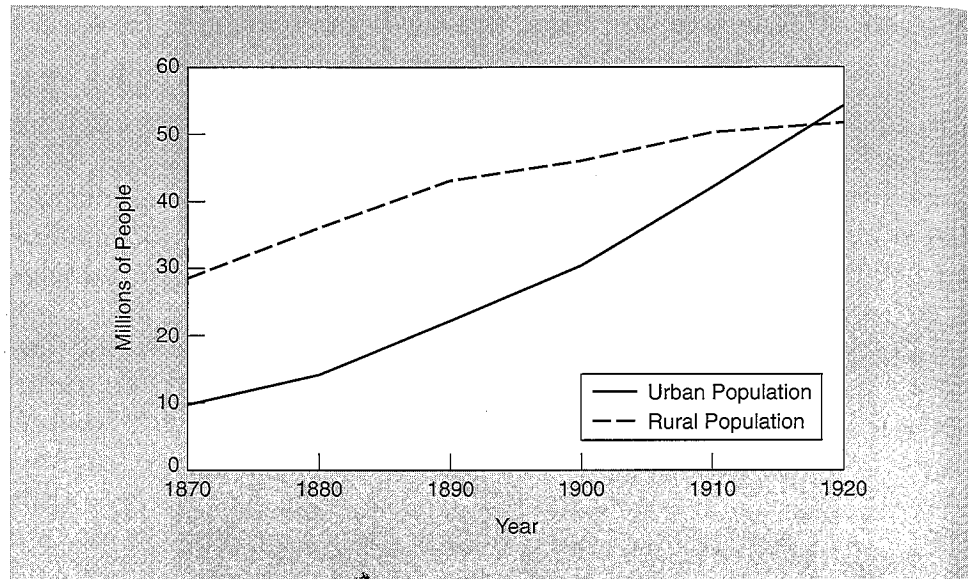
THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

In the late 1870s, the Grange lost members and influence. One reason was the failure of its co-ops. Another was a rise in farm prices, which made many farmers feel there was less need for joint action. But their troubles were not over.

1. Early Success. When farm prices fell once again in the 1880s, farmers began to form large regional organizations. The National Farmers' Alliance consisted of farmers in the Midwest and the Great Plains. The Southern Farmers' Alliance served the South's white farmers, and the Colored Farmers' Alliance, its African-American farmers. By 1890, the three groups claimed a combined membership of about 2 million.

READING A GRAPH

Urban and Rural Populations, 1870–1920



1. In 1870, which was larger—the nation's urban population or its rural population?
2. In 1920, which was larger—the nation's urban population or its rural population?
3. In what year were urban and rural populations equal?

Like the Grange, the alliances started out by providing social and educational programs for their members but soon began to call for political and economic reforms. In 1890, the alliances succeeded in electing a number of their supporters to state legislatures and to Congress. Thus encouraged, they decided to combine with labor groups to form a new political party.

In 1892, the newly organized Populist party held a national convention in Omaha, Nebraska. The Populist platform called for (1) *free silver* (increased coinage of silver); (2) an increase in the amount of money in circulation; (3) a *graduated income tax*—an income tax that would tax large incomes at progressively higher rates; (4) savings banks at post offices; (5) public ownership and operation of transportation and communication services; (6) election of U.S. senators by popular vote; (7) a one-term limit for presidents; (8) the se-

cret ballot; (9) restrictions on immigration; and (10) a shorter work-day. In the election of 1892, the Populist candidate for president was James B. Weaver. Although he came in third, he received the impressive total of more than 1 million popular votes.

2. The Money Question. The first two Populist demands—increased coinage of silver and more money in circulation—concerned issues that were of great concern in the late 1800s. The United States was in a period of *deflation* (constantly falling prices). This was particularly hard on farmers and other people with debts. They had to pay back their loans with money that was worth more than the money they had borrowed. Debtors urged a policy that would bring about *inflation* (constantly rising prices). If the value of money fell, they would find it easier to repay what they owed.

One cause of inflation is an increase in the money supply. So farmers wanted the government to issue more money, and they wanted it backed by silver. For a long time, the government had bought both silver and gold to back its paper currency. But in 1873, new finds in Western mines led to a surplus of silver, and the government had stopped buying it. In response to pressure from farmers and mine owners, Congress passed the Bland-Allison Act (1878) and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act (1890). These laws required the government to buy and coin a certain amount of silver each month. Proponents of silver called for a further expansion of silver coinage. In the phrase of the time, they demanded “free silver.” This plank in the Populist platform attracted members of other political parties.

THE ELECTION OF 1896

Soon after Cleveland began his second term, the financial panic of 1893 shook the country. It was followed by a depression. Hundreds of businesses and banks failed, and thousands of people lost their jobs. In 1894, Jacob S. Coxey, an Ohio businessman, led an “army” of some 500 unemployed people to Washington. They demanded that the government sponsor *public works* projects—building roads, bridges, and other public facilities—to create jobs. Coxey was arrested. Also in 1894, the Pullman strike took place.

The money issue was pressing, too. Like other conservatives of the day, Cleveland was a firm believer in the *gold standard* (gold as the only backing for paper money). Believing that the Sherman Silver Purchase Act had caused the panic of 1893, he persuaded Congress to repeal it. But the depression continued, and the treasury’s



William Jennings Bryan delivering a speech at the Democratic national convention, July 1896: "We will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: 'You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.'"

supply of gold decreased. In 1895, the government had to turn to J.P. Morgan and other private bankers for help. When they bought gold from abroad to add to the government's supply, Populists and others accused Cleveland of selling out to Wall Street. Americans now were sharply divided. For the "cheap money" supporters, free silver was the only answer. The "sound money" people were equally certain that the gold standard had to prevail.

1. The Conventions. In 1896, the Republicans nominated Governor William McKinley of Ohio for president. Their platform supported business interests and the gold standard.

The Democrats, who met in July, were divided into free-silver and "goldbug" factions. On the second day of their national convention, a former congressman from Nebraska named William Jennings Bryan made a rousing speech in support of free silver. The next day, the convention nominated him for president.

The Populists faced a difficult choice. Should they support the Democratic candidates or nominate their own? The Democratic platform

advocated free silver, but it ignored many other reforms that the Populists wanted. Finally, they decided to support Bryan. But they put him on their own ticket with a Populist vice presidential candidate.

2. The Campaign. In the election campaign of 1896, McKinley stood for respectability and laissez-faire capitalism. Bryan championed the “toiling masses” against big business. He promised that a free-silver policy would bring back good times. Bryan’s opponents denounced him as a revolutionist and predicted economic chaos if he were elected.

McKinley won by a sizable margin, the biggest in 20 years. Although Bryan carried the South and most of the West, he failed to gain the support of the industrialized Midwest and Northeast. In these regions, many Democrats crossed party lines to vote for McKinley. Bryan’s defeat marked the virtual end of the free-silver issue and Populism.

IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: free silver, gold standard, graduated income tax, secret ballot, public works.

CRITICAL THINKING: Who wanted inflation in the period after the Civil War? Why did these people want it? How did they try to achieve it?

Chapter Review

MATCHING TEST

Column A

1. Promontory Point
2. Oliver H. Kelley
3. Little Bighorn
4. Geronimo
5. open range

Column B

- a. unfenced, public grassland
- b. site of Custer’s Last Stand
- c. Apache leader
- d. place where Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads linked
- e. founder of the Grange

MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST

1. The Pony Express became unnecessary after (a) the establishment of the Butterfield Overland Mail (b) the construction of the

- Union Pacific Railroad (c) the opening of the Chisholm Trail (d) the completion of a transcontinental telegraph.
2. The first railroad line to cross the last frontier connected (a) Omaha and Sacramento (b) Santa Fe and Los Angeles (c) Kansas City and Santa Fe (d) New Orleans and Los Angeles.
 3. Large-scale cattle ranching began in (a) Kansas (b) Texas (c) Arkansas (d) Nebraska.
 4. After the Civil War, the main goal of the federal government policy toward Native Americans was to (a) move all Native Americans to Indian Territory (b) force Native Americans to migrate to Canada (c) move them to reservations (d) prevent settlers from taking Native-American lands.
 5. All of the following were aims of most white Southerners after the Civil War *except* (a) protecting the civil rights of African Americans (b) industrializing (c) growing more kinds of crops (d) becoming less dependent on cotton.
 6. The main issue in the presidential campaign of 1892 was (a) civil service (b) the tariff (c) regulating the railroads (d) restricting immigration.
 7. Most farmers in the late 19th century were disturbed by all of the following *except* (a) inflation (b) railroad freight charges (c) high interest rates (d) loss of their farms.
 8. The Grange was strongest in the (a) South (b) Northeast (c) Rocky Mountain states (d) Midwest.
 9. All of the following were planks in the 1892 Populist platform *except* (a) more money in circulation (b) a gold standard (c) public ownership of railroads (d) graduated income tax.
 10. The main campaign issue in the presidential election of 1896 was (a) free silver (b) the Interstate Commerce Act (c) labor unions (d) voting rights.



ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. What attracted settlers to the "last frontier"?
2. Why was farming difficult on the Great Plains? Describe some techniques that helped farmers there.

3. What is a laissez-faire policy? What attempts were made to modify it in the United States late in the 19th century?
4. How and why did the Southern states restrict the rights of African Americans after Reconstruction?
5. Who wanted high tariffs in the period after the Civil War? Why?

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

This question is based on the accompanying documents (1–5). It will improve your ability to work with historical documents.

Historical Context:

From 1880 to 1900, big industries could force weaker companies out of business by forming pools, trusts, and monopolies. Most small business owners lacked the legal weapons or economic power to combat cutthroat competition. Farmers, however, organized the Grange and persuaded state legislatures to regulate the unfair practices of railroad monopolies and grain elevator operators.

Task:

Using information from the documents and your knowledge of United States history, read each document and answer the question that follows it. Your answers to the questions will help you write the document-based essay.

Document 1. Excerpts from the *Declaration of Purposes of the National Grange*, 1874:

We propose meeting together, talking together, working together, buying together, selling together, and, in general, acting together for our mutual protection and advancement, as occasion may require. . . .

We desire proper equality, equity, and fairness; protection for the weak; restraint upon the strong; in short, justly distributed burdens and justly distributed power. These are American ideas, the very essence of American independence, and to advocate the contrary is unworthy of the sons and daughters of an American Republic.

Source: www.geocities.com/cannongrange/declaration_purposes.html

Would you say that the farmers who wrote the *Declaration of the Purposes* believed in “strength in numbers”? Explain your answer.

Document 2. Study the political cartoon on page 238.

Why do you think the member of the Grange (the young man) is shown as more aware of the trouble the oncoming train can cause than are the rest of the people in the cartoon?

Document 3. Quote attributed to Kansas populist Mary Elizabeth Lease, about 1890:

What you farmers need to do is to raise less corn and more Hell! We want the accursed foreclosure system wiped out. . . . We will stand by our homes and stay by our firesides by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the Government pays its debts to us.

Source: Barr, Elizabeth N. “The Populist Uprising,” in W.E. Donnelley (ed.) *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*, II (1928), p. 1148, as reprinted in Bailey, Thomas A. and Kennedy, David M. *The American Spirit*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

What problem or problems was Lease describing?

Document 4. Excerpt from a letter of W.M. Taylor, a farmer, to the editor of *Farmer’s Alliance* (published in Lincoln, Nebraska), January 10, 1891:

We are cursed . . . not by the hot winds so much as by the swindling games of the bankers and money loaners. . . . I have borrowed for example \$1,000. I pay \$25 besides to the commission man. I give my note and second mortgage of 3 per cent of the \$1,000, which is \$30 more. Then I pay 7 per cent on the \$1,000 to the actual loaner. . . . The time comes to pay. . . . If I can’t get the money, I have the extreme pleasure of seeing my property taken and sold by this iron handed money loaner while my family and I suffer.

Source: faculty.washington.edu/qtaylor/Coures/101_USH/101_manual_6.htm. Also Marcus, Robert D., Marcus, Anthony and Buner, David (eds.) *America Firsthand*. NY: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1989, II, p. 99.

What did Taylor think of bankers and money loaners he had to deal with? Explain your answer.

Document 5. Excerpt from the Populist party platform, which attacked the Democratic and Republican parties, 1892:

We have witnessed, for more than a quarter of a century, the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder,

while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering of the people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them.

Source: *ibid.* Also Current, Richard N. and Garraty, John A. (eds.) *Words That Made American History Since the Civil War*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965, pp. 223, 226-227.

What did the Populist party platform accuse the Democratic and Republican parties of ignoring?

DOCUMENT-BASED ESSAY

Using information from the above documents and your knowledge of United States history, write an essay in which you:

- Explain why between 1874 and 1896 farmers became more frustrated with their lives.
- Explain to what extent they tried to improve their lives and tell how successful they were.