

Chapter Summary

Settling the West, 1865–1890

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why would people take on the challenges of life in the West?

This chapter examines the movement of people into the Great Plains, and describes ranching opportunities, improved farming technology, and the impact on the Native American population.

Miners and Ranchers

- Deposits of precious minerals, such as gold, silver, and copper, were discovered.
- Frontier towns grew rapidly into small cities called boomtowns.
- New mining technologies, such as hydraulic mining, made it possible to remove vast quantities of earth and process it, but it was at a great price to the environment.
- Large population growth resulted in new states: Colorado, North and South Dakota, Nevada, Arizona, and Montana were all added to the Union.
- Texas longhorn cattle adapted and were able to survive on the plains.
- Barbed wire fenced in the open range and was one reason ranching became big business and the cattle drives ended.
- Railroads provided an easy way to ship cattle to the East.
- Settlers from the East clashed with Mexican Americans over land that often dated back to the Spanish land grants.

Farming the Plains

- The Homestead Act, passed in 1862, encouraging settlers to move west.

- New farming technologies, such as Deere's steel-tipped plow, made it possible to farm on hard ground.
- Bonanza farming enabled farmers to form companies and hire laborers to plant thousands of acres which then yielded large profits.
- Railroads brought settlers, lumber, coal, and other supplies to the plains.
- The Great Plains became the nation's Wheat Belt.

Native Americans

- Miners, ranchers, and farmers competed with the nomadic Native Americans for ownership and use of the land.
- After a number of conflicts resulting in massacres, such as the Fetterman Massacre and the Sand Creek Massacre, reservations were established and Native Americans were often forced to relocate to these new homes.
- George A. Custer, ignoring orders, attacked and was defeated by the Lakota and Cheyenne, in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.
- The Dawes Act, passed by Congress in 1887, allotted land to the Native Americans.