The Taming of the “Wild West”

Factors that make possible the settlement of the West:

- Manifest Destiny
- Genocide of the Indians
- Government Assistance
  - Homestead Act, Timber Culture Act, Desert Land Act, Timber and Stone Act
  - Land grants to railroads
- Transcontinental Railroads
- Technological Advances
1. What national issues emerged in the process of closing the western frontier?

2. Why does the West hold such an important place in the American imagination?

3. In what ways is the West romanticized in American culture?
Key Tensions

Native Americans → Buffalo Hunters
Railroads U. S. Government

Cattlemen → Sheep Herders

Ranchers → Farmers
Key Tensions

- Ethnic Minorities
- Nativists

- Environmentalists
- Big Business Interests [mining, timber]
  - Local Govt. Officials
  - Farmers
  - Buffalo Hunters

- Lawlessness of the Frontier
- "Civilizing" Forces
  - [The "Romance" of the West]
Land for the Taking: Speculators and Railroads

- Most land acquired by wealthy investors
- Speculators send agents to stake out best land for high prices
  - river bottoms
  - irrigable areas
  - control of water
- Railroads settle grants with immigrants
“The Big Four” Railroad Magnates

Charles Crocker

Collis Huntington

Mark Hopkins

Leland Stanford
Promontory Point, UT
(May 10, 1869)
the cowboys
The Bronc Buster
Frederick Remington
Black Cowboys
the

GUNSLINGERS
Colt .45 Revolver

God didn’t make men equal. Colonel Colt did!
Legendary Gunslingers & Train Robbers

Jesse James

Billy the Kid
Dodge City Peace Commission, 1890

W.H. Harris
Luke Short
Bat Masterson

Charles Basset
Wyatt Earp
L. McLean
Neal Brown
the MINERS
The Bonanza West

• Quest to “get rich quick” produces:
  – uneven growth
  – boom-and-bust economic cycles
  – wasted resources
  – "instant cities" like San Francisco

• Institutions based on bonanza mentality
Mining Regions of the West
Mining Bonanza:
Camp Life

- Camps sprout with each first strike
- Camps governed by simple democracy
- Men outnumber women two-to-one
- Most men, some women work claims
- Most women earn wages as cooks, housekeepers, and seamstresses
Mining Bonanza: Ethnic Hostility

- 25-50% of camp citizens were foreign-born
- French, Latin Americans, Chinese hated
- 1850--California Foreign Miner's Tax drives foreigners out
- 1882--federal Chinese Exclusion Act suspends Chinese immigration for 10 years
Mining Bonanza: 
Effects of the Mining Boom

• Contributes millions to economy
• Helps finance Civil War, industrialization
• Relative value of silver and gold change
• Early statehood for Nevada, Idaho, Montana
• Invaded Indian reservations
• Scarred, polluted environment
• Ghost towns
Mining Centers: 1900

- Chief manufacturing cities
- Copper mining
- Iron and steel mills
- Iron ore
- Coal mining
- Silver and gold mining
Mining ("Boom") Towns--Now Ghost Towns

Calico, CA
The Cattlemen & the Sheep Herders
Gold from the Roots Up: The Cattle Bonanza

• The Far West ideal for cattle grazing
• Cattle drives take herds to rail heads
• Trains take herds to Chicago for processing
• Profits enormous for large ranchers
• Cowboys work long hours for little pay
• Cowboys self-governing
Gold from the Roots Up: The Cattle Bonanza (2)

- By 1880 wheat farmers begin fencing range
- Mechanization modernizes ranching
- 1886--harsh winter kills thousands of cattle
- Ranchers reduce herds, switch to sheep
The Cattle Trails
The Range Wars

Sheep Herders

Cattle Ranchers
Why were there conflicts sometimes between Homesteaders and Cattle Drivers?

• Competition
  – As more homesteaders settled the Plains there was less...
    • Grazing land
    • Access to water
  – “Range wars” would sometimes take place
The Farmers
1887 Land Promotion Poster for the Dakota Territories
What is the Message of this Picture?
The Reality--A Pioneer’s Sod House, SD
What challenges faced Homesteaders on the Plains?

- Isolation
- Natural disasters...
  - Blizzards
  - Droughts
  - Insects/Pests
- “breaking” the soil
- Access to markets
- Lack of ground water
  - Drove the need for effective windmills
Sodbusters on the Plains: The Farming Bonanza

• 1870-1890 farm population triples on plains
• African-American “Exoduster” farmers migrate from the South to escape racism
• Water, building materials scarce
• Sod houses common first dwelling
New Farming Methods

• Barbed wire allows fencing without wood

• Dry farming--deeper tilling, use of mulch

• New strains of wheat resistant to frost

• 1885-1890--drought ruins bonanza farms

• Small-scale, diversified farming adopted
Barbed Wire

Joseph Glidden
New Agricultural Technology

"Prairie Fan" Water Pump

Steel Plow [""Sod Buster""]
Discontent on the Farm

• Farmers’ grievances
  – declining crop prices
  – rising rail rates
  – heavy mortgages

• The Grange becomes a political lobby

• Trans-Mississippi farmers become more commercial, scientific, productive
Minority groups in the West
The Spanish-Speaking Southwest

• Spanish-speakers of Southwest contribute to culture, institutions
  – irrigation
  – stock management
  – weaving
  – natural resource management
• Spanish-Mexican Californians lose lands after 1860s
Regional Population Distribution by Race: 1900

Whites of native parentage (N = 40,988,005)

- South: 49.1%
- West: 15.5%
- North: 35.4%
Regional Population Distribution by Race: 1900

American Indians (N = 240,280)
- South: 4.1%
- West: 80.6%
- North: 15.3%

Chinese and Japanese birth or parentage (N = 114,777)
- South: 3.0%
- West: 80.7%
- North: 16.4%
Black
“Exoduster”
Homesteaders

---

All Colored People

THAT WANT TO

GO TO KANSAS,

On September 5th, 1877,

Can do so for $5.00

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IMMIGRATION.

WHEREAS, We, the colored people of Lexington, Ky., knowing that there is an abundance of choice lands now belonging to the Government, have assembled ourselves together for the purpose of locating on said lands. Therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That we do now organize ourselves into a Colony, as follows:—Any person wishing to become a member of this Colony can do so by paying the sum of one dollar ($1.00), and this money is to be paid by the first of September, 1877, in installments of twenty-five cents at a time, or otherwise as may be desired.

RESOLVED, That this Colony has agreed to consolidate itself with the Nicodemus Towns, Solomon Valley, Graham County, Kansas, and can only do so by entering the vacant lands now in their midst, which costs $5.00.

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall consist of seven officers—President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and three Trustees. President—M. M. Bell; Vice-President—Isaac Talbott; Secretary—W. J. Niles; Treasurer—Daniel Clarke; Trustees—Jerry Lee, William Jones, and Abner Webster.

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall have from one to two hundred militia, more or less, as the case may require, to keep peace and order, and any member failing to pay in his dues, as aforesaid, or failing to comply with the above rules in any particular, will not be recognized or protected by the Colony.
The Buffalo Soldiers on the Great Plains
The “Chinese Question”

- Exclusion Act (1882)
  - Oriental Exclusion Act
  - Chinese Exclusion Act
The Tong Wars: 1850s-1920s

Began in San Francisco in 1875.
### African American & Chinese Populations: 1880-1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Territory</th>
<th>Blacks 1880</th>
<th>Blacks 1900</th>
<th>Chinese 1880</th>
<th>Chinese 1900</th>
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<td>1,846</td>
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NA—not available.

*Combined total for Indian and Oklahoma territories.
The Final Fling

- 1889 -- Oklahoma opened to white settlement
- Changing views of Far West
  - “Frontier thesis” treated West as cradle of individualism, innovation
  - New Western History sees West as arena of conflicting interests, erosion of environment
the myth
& legend
of the west
The Traditional View of the West
William “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s Wild West Show
“Buffalo Bill” Cody & Sitting Bull
Legendary Female Western Characters

Calamity Jane  

Annie Oakley
The Fall of the Cowboy
Frederick Remington
what were the long-term effects of the westward experience?
Destruction of the Buffalo Herds

The near extinction of the buffalo.
National Parks
Conservation Movement

John Muir

With President
Theodore Roosevelt
Sierra Club

Founded in 1892