

## **VI. Farming (*the third western frontier*)**

### **A. Homestead Act of 1862**

- 1. Settler could acquire as much as 160 acres of land by living on it 5 years, improving it, and paying a nominal fee averaging about \$30 (as low as \$10) -- Residency on land required for ownership**
- 2. As an alternative, land might be acquired after only 6 months' residence at \$1.25/acre.**

### **B. Departure from previous federal land policy (selling land for revenue) -- Now, given away to encourage settlement of the West and stimulus to the family farm**

### **C. Results**

- 1. About 500,000 families migrated to the West -- Yet, about 5X as many purchased lands from railroads, land companies, or states.**
- 2. Thousands of homesteaders forced to give up in the face of inadequate 160 acre plots and drought, hail, and ravage from insects.**
- 3. Perhaps 10X more of public domain ended up belonging to promoters, not farmers -- Corporations used "dummy" homesteaders to grab the best properties containing lumber, minerals, and oil.**
- 4. Federal trend of "free land" lasted until 1934**

### **D. Development of the Great American Desert**

- 1. Black sod of the prairies (e.g. Kansas) could now be developed with special plows -- Land became extremely fruitful and shattered the myth of the Great American Desert**
- 2. Railroads played a role in taming the West.**
  - a. Profitable marketing of crops.**
  - b. Inducing Americans & European immigrants to buy cheap lands earlier granted by government.**
- 3. Improved irrigation techniques helped deserts to bloom (e.g. Mormons in Utah)**
- 4. Tough strains of wheat resistant to cold imported from Russia.**
- 5. Flour-milling process by John S. Pillsbury of Minneapolis, increased demand for grain.**
- 6. Barbed-wire invented by Joseph F. Glidden in 1874**
  - a. By 1883, his company using his patent was making 600 miles of wire each day.**
  - b. Gave farmer greater protection against trespassing cattle**

## **VII. End of the Frontier**

### **A. Incredible growth from 1870s to 1890s**

- 1. New states: Colorado (1876)**
- 2. 1888-1889: Republican Congress admitted six new States as they sought more Republican electoral votes: ND, SD, MT, WA, ID, WY**
- 3. Utah admitted in 1896 after it banned polygamy in 1890.**

### **B. Oklahoma Land Rush, April 22, 1889**

- 1. U.S. made available to settlers vast stretches of land formerly occupied by the Creeks and Seminoles in the district of Oklahoma.**
- 2. Nearly 100,000 "boomers" or "eighty-niners" poured in from the OK border.**
  - a. By day's end, nearly 2 million acres had been settled.**
  - b. "Sooners" -- land-grabbers who claimed land illegally before land rush began.**
- 3. By year's end, OK had 60,000 inhabitants and Congress made it a Territory; in 1907, it became "the Sooner State"**

**C. Frederick Jackson Turner's "Safety valve" theory**

1. Supposedly, when hard times came, city unemployed moved west to farm and prospered.
2. In reality, few city folk in populous eastern centers migrated to frontier during depressions.
  - a. Did not know how to farm or could not raise necessary \$ for transportation, livestock, and machinery.
  - b. Most settlers who moved west came from farms on older frontier.
  - c. In fact, near century's end, many farmers moved to the city.
3. Free acreage did lure immigrant farmers who would otherwise have stayed in eastern cities further increasing the perils of the slums.
4. Frontier did lure restless and adventurous spirits, mostly young, who wanted to achieve the "American Dream"
5. Frontier did have a psychological impact on easterners who could, if they desired, flee to the frontier -- May have had an impact in wage increases for eastern workers.

**VIII. The Farm Becomes a Factory**

**A. Mississippi region experienced somewhat of an agricultural revolution after the Civil War.**

1. Farmers concentrated on a single cash-crop such as wheat or corn → America became the world's breadbasket and meat producer.
2. Massive migration of white and black Americans out of Southern Cotton Belt – Largest population shift in American history (most were white)

**B. For farmers, represented one of most wrenching changes in American history.**

1. "Crop lien" system was the basis of the commercialization of southern agriculture.
  - a. A planter or merchant extended a line of credit (at exorbitant interest rates) to a moneyless farmer.
    - 1) Impossible for farmer to get out of debt.
    - 2) Resulted in many poor white and black farmers becoming landless tenant farmers or sharecroppers.
  - b. Credit merchants who came to power in post-Reconstruction South acquired much land at the expense of small farmers.
  - c. 1870s: 20% of Southern farmers were tenants, mostly freed slaves.
  - d. 1910s: 50% of farmers were tenants, many were newly landless whites.
2. Some small-scale farmers, unskilled in business, often blamed banks and railroads rather than their own shortcomings for their losses.
3. Gave rise to Populist movement of victimized farmers.

**C. Economic problems plaguing farmers**

1. Deflated currency and low food prices were the chief worries among farmers.
2. Natural disasters: freezing temperatures, insects, diseases
3. Government-added woes
  - a. Farmers' land often over-assessed making property taxes higher.
  - b. Protective tariffs hurt the South as manufactured product prices increased -- Farmers products unprotected in competitive world market.
4. Agricultural-related trusts soaked farmers: barbed-wire trust, fertilizer trust, harvester trust, and railroad trust (freight rates)
5. Farmers underrepresented politically and poorly organized