Notes Ch 5 sec 1

Cultures Clash on the Prairie

Plains Indians

Some were farmers – Osage and Iowa

Some were nomadic hunters and gatherers – Sioux and Cheyenne

All had highly structured societies with laws and customs, engaged in trade with one another.

In 1598 the Spanish arrived with horses and guns – that were soon traded with Native people. More successful hunts, more range

By the mid – 1700 most Plains tribes relied on buffalo hunting for most of their people’s needs

Territorial disputes between tribes regarding hunting grounds leads to armed conflicts, replace the older counting coup tradition.

Tribal groups based on extended family units, hand down stories, customs technological info on making the things they need. Tribal lands are held in common, and the concept of owning land as an individual is not part of the culture.

Settlers Push Westward

Settlers from the East have a culture that differs from the Indian nations. Land becomes an issue right away as hunting grounds are seen as unused, unsettled and available for the newcomers. First by wagon and later by train they move into Indian lands.

Gold and silver strikes bring more settlers west – 1858 gold in Colorado – boomtowns spring up overnight – poorly constructed buildings, bad sanitation, drawing thousands of people from all over – mostly men but also some women.

Prospectors have a less than 1% of striking it rich on average – the merchants who serve them do far better.

Government restricts Native Americans –

In 1834 Great Plains = reservation for Native Americans

By 1850 the government is starting to back track about that – separate and smaller reservations for each tribe. Some Native groups fight back – it doesn’t end well. Indians, Settlers, Miners all are in conflict over land and who has the right to it.

November 29 1864 Sand Creek Massacre – Cheyenne and Arapaho people camped in the Sand Creek Reserve in Colorado are attacked by the US Army led by Colonel Chivington and slaughtered based on unfounded rumors that they were planning to attack settlers. Most of the dead were elderly, women and children.

December 1866 Bozeman Trail ran through Sioux hunting grounds and sacred mountain lands in Wyoming and Montana – despite requests from Red Cloud settlers and others kept using this trail – Crazy Horse ambushed the US Army and killed 80 soldiers for using this trail. Treaty of Fort Laramie closed the trail, but shortly after gold was discovered in the in 1874 Black Hills and all bets were off. The US government no longer honored the treaty.

June 1876 Custer and the US Army 7th Cavalry attacks a sun dance encampment on the Little Big Horn – his Crow guides put on their traditional clothes, discard their army uniforms and leave knowing that the army was outnumbered and things would not end well. And they don’t.

Custer’s Last Stand ruins the centennial celebration for the US

Sitting Bull and others flee to Canada until the excitement settles down. Sitting Bull takes up with Wild Bill Cody and travels Europe in the Wild West show – later returning to be killed in December 1890 by the native police force at Standing Rock Agency when it was believed he was trying to bring back the practice of “Ghost Dance” for the Lakota Sioux.

DEC 28 1890 🡪 Big Foot takes the remaining Hunkpapa off Standing Rock in an attempt to reach Red Cloud at Pine Ridge Agency. Around 350 Sioux camped at Wounded Knee Creek and were surrounded by the Seventh Cavalry – Custer’s old army unit. The Sioux surrendered their weapons but the army opened fire anyway slaughtering 300 unarmed men, women and children. It is the last time the army fires on Native Americans – and the end of the resistance on the part of the Natives to the new reservation system.

THE DAWES ACT – 1887 –

An attempt to fully assimilate Native Americans – broke up the reservations and gave 160 acres of land to each head of household and 80 acres to any unmarried adult. The remainder of reservation land was divided up and sold to settlers with the money going to buy farming equipment of Native Americans. By 1932 most of the land covered by Dawes had landed in the hands of non-Indians, and no Native American received money from the settler land sales.

The Census from Dawes is used to verify tribal membership today.

Cattle become Big Business

When the buffalo go they are replaced on the Plains by horses and herds of cattle – ranchers flood into the area and start raising thousands of cattle on the wide open spaces from Kansas to Texas. The longhorn, sturdy and strong was the Spanish import cow of choice that they raised.

The cowboy learned how to manage these beasts from the Mexican Vaqueros who did the job with spurs and chaps and a trusty horse. Once the railroads reached the Great Plains after the Civil War it was possible to raise cattle and ship them back east to an American public anxious for beef and beef products. Many famous cattle trails led to the rail towns like Denver, Abilene, Cheyenne where cattle would be fattened up and then shipped off to slaughterhouses in Omaha, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City. The Union Stock Yards in Chicago opened in 1865, and surrounding meat processors made short work of cattle shipped their way. Many western cities got their start as towns where cattle could be gathered and shipped to eastern markets.

Estimates are that 55,000 cowboys worked the Plains between 1866 and 1885. Many were Mexican or African American. It was hard, non-stop work with 10 – 14 hour days herding skittish animals over vast expanses of land. Most were done by age 40.

Spring round up – cattle are corralled and new calves branded – then 250 to 300 cattle were driven north to a railhead. The process took about 3 months.

As the business grew and more herds were on the move over the Plains there were more and more issues with cattle trampling crops of farmers along the way . When a series of harsh winters and dry summers killed off many of the cattle on the Open Range ranchers turned to smaller herds of high quality animals with better meat yields. Farmers and ranchers alike fenced their lands with Joseph Glidden’s new barbed wire, and the era of the Open Range cattle ranchers came to an end.

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After the Civil War the pace of settlement in the west picked up –

Railroads were given land grants to build tracks through the west, land to sell to fund track laying – and thousands of miles of track laid that allowed settlers to go west faster than before.

By 1869 the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific met at Promontory Point Utah creating the first transcontinental railroad connecting the country and allowing travelers to go coast to coast in a few days instead of weeks or months. 15 years later 5 transcontinental rail lines crossed the nation. Railroad companies sold some lands to farmers, some went to Europe and recruited immigrants from there to settle -- 44% percent of settlers in Nebraska and 70 percent in Minnesota and Wisconsin were fresh from Europe.

Homestead Act 1862 – land for free in 160 acre parcels for settlers, if they occupied and developed the land. 1862 to 1900 up to 600K families took advantage of this offer. Speculators and cattlemen, miners and woodcutters abused the system and in the end only about 10% of the land was actually settled by the people it was intended for. Land conditions varied, so not all land was useable – Wisconsin versus Nebraska.

Oklahoma – 1889 – the land giveaway to in OK gave 2 million acres away in a single day to thousands of “Sooners” – some of whom skipped the starting bell and started early.

By 1890 American lands were claimed, settled – the Census Bureau declared the frontier dead. Some people believe that the idea of the endless frontier played a large part in shaping the American character – the problem solving, risk taking, curious American mind.

Settlers faced extreme hardships floods, droughts, blizzards, locusts, raids by outlaws and Native Americans and yet by 1900 30% of Americans lived west of the Mississippi River.

Where there were no trees settlers built houses underground, or out of slabs of the thick prairie sod. Women made clothing, preserved food, made candles, and worked alongside men in the fields.

New inventions like the steel plow (could slice through heavy prairie sod) and mechanical planters, processors and harvesters allowed the prairie to be farmed more easily, reducing the amount of time and energy required.

Morrill Act (1862 and 1890) – creates agricultural colleges (106 in all) Wisconsin, Ohio State, Minnesota, Iowa, Kentucky to name just a few. Researchers worked on new plant varieties, dry land farming techniques and ways to improve agriculture and farming.

Farmers fought the weather, and borrowed money to buy new machinery. Farming is no way to get rich, and most do not. In fact pressure from big business one crop bonanza farms was hard on small farmers from 1879 to 1885, but droughts were easier to survive for the more flexible small farmers, and they outlived the big ones.

Railroads gouged farmers for shipping where there was no competition, bankers loaned them money to get more land, more machinery and to get through tough times of bad weather and low prices. Farmers went further and further into debt, despite producing all the food they could….. something needed to change.

Section 3 Farmers and Populist Movement p. 219

During the Civil War the government issued a new form of currency to allow wartime goods to be more easily bought and sold. Many farmers borrowed money while this currency was being used. After the war greenback currency was retired and replaced with money backed by gold and silver. Greenbacks could not be exchanged for the “Hard” currency, and farmers who borrowed greenback dollars were now expected to pay back their loans in the more valuable new money. Less money was in circulation in the new system and to make matter worse the prices for farm goods fell, wheat bushel from $2 to 60 cents.

Railroads and grain storage operators were conspiring to fix prices for shipping and storage of farmer’s grain, and many farmers mortgaged their farms for credit to buy seed and additional lands creating a cycle of debt that got worse and worse each year.

To fight back the farmers needed to organize. Patrons of Husbandry – later known as the Grange, began as a social outlet and educational forum for isolated farm families but evolved into a way to fight the abuses of the railroads. The Grange organized farmers, helped to set up cooperatives, taught farmers how to sponsor state legislation to get regulate railroads.

Other farmer’s organizations came into being, alliances between farmers and those who sympathized with them. Speakers traveled to educate people about ways to solve the problems farmers faced. Over 4 million alliance members spanned the South and West, mostly. (Segregated – Colored Farmer’s Alliance 250K)

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The leaders of this movement began to build a political power base…. The power of the people was expressed in the Populist or People’s Party in 1892 – they wanted to lift debt from the farmers and other workers, and give the people a greater voice in their government.

Populist Party economic reforms:

Increase in the money supply

Rise in prices received for goods and services

Graduated income tax

A federal loan program for farmers

Government reforms

Direct election of US Senators

Single terms for president and vice president

A secret ballot to vote fraud

Worker reforms – 8 hour day & restrictions on immigration

These proposed changes were attractive to farmers and laborers – the Populist presidential campaign won 10% of the total vote. In the West where support was strongest the People’s Party elected five senators, 1500 state legislators. The Populist Party platform is eventually adopted by the Democratic party – the concept that the government is responsible for reforming social injustices.

During the 1800s Farmers were in debt trouble, more railroads existed than the market could support, and many began to go bankrupt. In 1893 The government gold supply had worn thin, because the government was obligated to buy and hold silver. People panicked – and it spread to Wall Street where the prices of stocks fell rapidly. The price of silver plunged, by the end of the year 15,000 businesses and 500 banks had collapsed. Investments declined, consumer purchases, wages, and prices fell. 3 million people lost their jobs. By December 1894 a fifth of the work force was unemployed.

The political parties divided over how to solve the crisis in the election of 1896

Republicans – mainly business owners, bankers of the Northeast

Democrats – farmers and laborers, of the South and West especially

Which metal would be the basis of the monetary system?

Silverites favored bimetallism, using gold and silver as a basis for the currency – this system meant there would be more money available since silver was plentiful, but dollars would be worth less, prices would rise – supporters believed it would stimulate the economy, put more money in the hands of more people.

Mainly Democrats

Gold bugs wanted a currency based solely on gold, which would reduce the amount of money in the economy, cause prices to fall, and would hopefully create a more stable money system.

The Populist Party joined the bimetalists – and eventually end up in an alliance with the Democrats, although they fielded their own candidates and kept their party intact. William Jennings Bryan became their candidate – he traveled the country with a stirring speech called “Cross of Gold” where he claimed the gold standard would crucify the worker and the farmer with its heavy burdens on ordinary people. He was quite a sensation. His opponent William McKinley of Ohio was a Republican who supported the gold standard. He did very little campaigning himself, letting others travel and speak for him while he mostly talked to reporters while he sat on his front porch.

McKinley beat Bryan by 500,000 votes. Populism collapsed, and dashed the hopes of farmers for the changes they needed. Two lessons were learned – 1) people can join together and have an impact on the political system and 2) the agenda of reforms of the Populists, which were enacted in the 20th century.