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Chapter 26 - The Great West and the Agricultural Revolution

I. The Clash of Cultures on the Plains

1. After the Civil War, the Great West was still relatively untamed, wild, full of Indians, bison, and wildlife, and sparsely populated by a few Mormons and Mexicans.
2. As the White settlers began to populate the Great West, the Indians, caught in the middle, increasingly turned against each other, were infected with White man's diseases, and stuck battling to hunt the few remaining bison that were still ranging around.
 - The Sioux, displaced by Chippewas from their ancestral lands at the headwaters of the Mississippi in the late 1700s, expanded at the expense of the Crows, Kiowas, and Pawnees, and justified their actions by reasoning that White men had done the same thing to them.
 - The Indians had become great riders, hunters, and fighters ever since the Spanish had introduced the horse to them.
3. The federal government tried to pacify the Indians by signing treaties at Fort Laramie in 1851 and Fort Atkinson in 1853 with the chiefs of the tribes. However, the U.S. failed to understand that such "tribes" and "chiefs" didn't necessarily represent groups of people in Indian culture, and that in most cases, Native Americans didn't recognize authorities outside of their families.
4. In the 1860s, the U.S. government intensified its efforts by herding Indians into still smaller and smaller reservations (like the Dakota Territory).
 - Indians were often promised that they wouldn't be bothered further after moving out of their ancestral lands, and often, Indian agents were corrupt and pawned off shoddy food and products to their own fellow Indians.
 - White men often disregarded treaties, though, and frequently swindled the Indians.
5. In frustration, many Native American tribes fought back. A slew of Indian vs. White skirmishes emerged between roughly 1864 to 1890 in the so-called "Indian Wars."
 - After the Civil War, the U.S. Army's new mission became—go clear Indians out of the West for White settlers to move in.
 - Many times though, the Indians were better equipped than the federal troops sent to quell their revolts because arrows could be fired more rapidly than a muzzle-loaded rifle. Invention of the Colt .45 revolver (six-shooter) and Winchester repeating rifle changed this.
 - Generals Sherman, Sheridan, and Custer (at Little Bighorn) all battled Indians.

II. Receding Native Population

1. Violence reigned supreme in Indian-White relations.
 - In 1864, at Sand Creek, Colorado, Colonel J.M. Chivington's militia massacred some four hundred Indians in cold blood—Indians who had thought they had been promised immunity and Indians who were peaceful and harmless.
 - In 1866, a Sioux war party ambushed Captain William J. Fetterman's command of 81 soldiers and civilians who were constructing the Bozeman Trail to the Montana goldfields, leaving no survivors.
 - This massacre was one of the few Indian victories, as another treaty at Fort Laramie was signed two years later.
2. Colonel Custer found gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota (sacred Sioux land), and hordes of gold-seekers invaded the Sioux reservation in search of gold, causing Sitting Bull and the Sioux to go on the warpath, completely decimating Custer's Seventh Cavalry at Little Big Horn in the process.
 - The reinforcements that arrived later brutally hunted down the Indians who had attacked, including their leader, Sitting Bull (he escaped).
3. The Nez Percé Indians also revolted when gold seekers made the government shrink their reservation by 90%, and after a tortuous battle, Chief Joseph finally surrendered his band after a long trek across the Continental Divide toward Canada. He buried his hatchet and gave his famous speech saying, "From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."
4. The most difficult to subdue were the Apache tribes of Arizona and New Mexico, led by Geronimo, but even they finally surrendered after being pushed to Mexico, and afterwards, they became successful farmers.
5. The Indians were subdued due to (1) the railroad, which cut through the heart of the West, (2) the White man's diseases, (3) the extermination of the buffalo, (4) wars, and (5) the loss of their land to White settlement.

III. Bellowing Herds of Bison

1. In the early days, tens of millions of bison dotted the American prairie, and by the end of the Civil War, there were still 15 million buffalo grazing, but it was the eruption of the railroad that really started the buffalo massacre.
 - Many people killed buffalo for their meat, their skins, or their tongues, but many people either killed the bison for sport or killed them, took only one small part of their bodies (like the tongue) and just left the rest of the carcass to rot.
2. By 1885, fewer than 1,000 buffalo were left, and the species was in danger of extinction. Those left were mostly in Yellowstone National Park.

IV. The End of the Trail

1. Sympathy for the Indians finally materialized in the 1880s, helped in part by Helen Hunt Jackson's book *A Century of Dishonor* and her novel *Ramona*.
 - Humanitarians wanted to kindly help Indians "walk the White man's road" while the hard-liners stuck to their "kill 'em all" beliefs, and no one cared much for the traditional Indian heritage and culture.

2. Often, zealous White missionaries would force Indians to convert, and in 1884, they helped urge the government to outlaw the sacred Sun Dance, called the Ghost Dance by Whites. It was a festival that Whites thought was the war-drum beating.
 - At the Battle of Wounded Knee, the “Ghost Dance” was brutally stamped out by U.S. troops, who killed women and children as well. This battle marks the end of the Indian Wars as by then the Indians were all either on reservations or dead.
3. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 dissolved the legal entities of all tribes, but if the Indians behaved the way Whites wanted them to behave (become farmers on reservations), they could receive full U.S. citizenship in 25 years (full citizenship to all Indians was granted in 1924). Ironically, an immigrant from a foreign nation could become a citizen much, much faster than a native-born Native American.
 - Reservation land not allotted to Indians under the act was sold to railroads.
 - In 1879, the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania was founded to teach Native American children how to behave like Whites, completely erasing their culture.
 - The Dawes Act struck forcefully at the Indians, and by 1900 they had lost half the land than they had held 20 years before. This plan would outline U.S. policy toward Indians until the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act which helped the Indian population rebound and grow.

V. Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker

1. Gold was discovered in California in the late 1840s, and in 1858, the same happened at Pike’s Peak in Colorado. “Fifty-Niners” flocked out there, but within a month or two, the gold had run out.
2. The Comstock Lode in Nevada was discovered in 1859, and a fantastic amount of gold and silver worth more than \$340 million was mined.
3. Smaller “lucky strikes” also drew money-lovers to Montana, Idaho, and other western states. Anarchy in these outposts seemed to rule, but in the end, what was left were usually ghost towns.
4. After the surface gold was found, ore-breaking machinery was brought in to break the gold-bearing quartz (which was very expensive to do).
5. Women found new rights in these Western lands however, gaining suffrage in Wyoming (1869) (the first place for women to vote), Utah (1870), Colorado (1893) and Idaho (1896).
6. Mining also added to the folklore and American literature (Bret Harte & Mark Twain).

VI. Beef Bonanzas and the Long Drive

1. As cities back east boomed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the demand for food and meat increased sharply.
2. The problem of marketing meat profitably to the public market and cities was solved by the new transcontinental railroads. Cattle could now be shipped to the stockyards under “beef barons” like the Swifts and Armours.
 - The meat-packaging industry thus sprang up.
3. The “Long Drive” emerged to become a spectacular feeder of the slaughterhouses, as Texas cowboys herded cattle across desolate land to railroad terminals in Kansas.
 - Dodge City, Abilene, Ogallala, and Cheyenne became favorite stopovers.
 - At Dodge City Wyatt Earp and in Abilene, Marshal James B. Hickok maintained order.
4. The railroads made the cattle herding business prosper, but it also destroyed it, for the railroads also brought sheepherders and

homesteaders who built barbed-wire, invented by Samuel Glidden, fences that erased the open-range days of the long cattle drives.

- Also, blizzards in the winter of 1886-87 left dazed cattle starving and freezing.

5. Breeders learned to fence their ranches and to organize (i.e. the Wyoming Stock-Growers' Association).

- The legends of the cowboys were made here at this time, but lived on in American lore.

VII. The Farmers' Frontier

1. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed folks to get as much as 160 acres of land in return for living on it for five years, improving it, and paying a nominal fee of about \$30.00. Or, it allowed folks to get land after only six month's residence for \$1.25 an acre.

- Before, the U.S. government had sold land for revenue, but now, it was giving it away.

- This act led half a million families to buy land and settle out West, but it often turned out to be a cruel hoax because in the dry Great Plains, 160 acres was rarely enough for a family to earn a living and survive. And often, families were forced to give up their homesteads before the five years were up, since droughts, bad land, and lack of necessities forced them out.

- However, fraud was spawned by the Homestead Act, since almost ten times as much land ended up in the hands of land-grabbing promoters than in the hands of real farmers. Sometimes these cheats would not even live on the land, but say that they'd erected a "twelve by fourteen" dwelling—which later turned out to be twelve by fourteen inches!

2. Taming Western Deserts

- Railroads such as the Northern Pacific helped develop the agricultural West, a place where, after the tough, horse-trodden lands had been plowed and watered, proved to be surprisingly fertile.

- Due to higher wheat prices resulting from crop failures around the world, more people rashly pushed further westward, past the 100th meridian (which is also the magic 20-inch per year rainfall line), where it was difficult to grow crops.

- Here, as warned by geologist John Wesley Powell, so little rain fell that successful farming could only be attained by massive irrigation.

- To counteract the lack of water (and a six year drought in the 1880s), farmers developed the technique of "dry farming," or using shallow cultivation methods to plant and farm, but over time, this method created a finely pulverized surface soil that contributed to the notorious "Dust Bowl" several decades later.

- A Russian species of wheat—tough and resistant to drought—was brought in and grew all over the Great Plains, while other plants were chosen in favor of corn.

- Huge federally financed irrigation projects soon caused the "Great American Desert" to bloom, and dams that tamed the Missouri and Columbia Rivers helped water the land.

VIII. The Far West Comes of Age

1. The Great West experienced a population surge, as many people moved onto the frontier.

2. New states like Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho, and Wyoming were admitted into the Union.

- Not until 1896 was Utah allowed into the Union, and by the 20th century, only Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona remained as territories.

- In Oklahoma, the U.S. government made available land that had formerly belonged to the Native Americans, and thousands of

- “Sooners” jumped the boundary line and illegally went into Oklahoma, often forcing U.S. troops to evict them.
- On April 22, 1889, Oklahoma was legally opened, and 18 years later, in 1907, Oklahoma became the “Sooner State.”
- 3. In 1890, for the first time, the U.S. census announced that a frontier was no longer discernible.
- 4. The “closing” of the frontier inspired the Turner Thesis, which stated that America needed a frontier.
- 5. At first, the public didn’t seem to notice that there was no longer a frontier, but later, they began to realize that the land was not infinite, and concern led to the first national park being opened, Yellowstone, founded in 1872, followed by Yosemite and Sequoia (1890).

IX. The Fading Frontier

1. The frontier was a state of mind and a symbol of opportunity.
2. The “safety valve theory” stated that the frontier was like a safety valve for folks who, when it became too crowded in their area, could simply pack up and leave, moving West.
 - Actually, few city-dwellers left the cities for the West, since they didn’t know how to farm; the West increasingly became less and less a land of opportunity for farms, but still was good for hard laborers and ranchers.
 - Still, free acreage did lure a host of immigrant farmers to the West—farmers that probably wouldn’t have come to the West had the land not been cheap—and the lure of the West may have led to city employers raising wages to keep workers in the cities.
3. It seems that the cities, not the West, were the safety valves, as busted farmers and fortune seekers made Chicago and San Francisco into large cities.
4. Of hundreds of years, Americans had expanded west, and it was in the trans-Mississippi west that the Indians made their last stand, where Anglo culture collided with Hispanic culture, and where America faced Asia.
5. The life that we live today is one that those pioneers dreamed of, and the life that they lived is one of which we can only dream.

X. The Farm Becomes a Factory

1. Farmers were now increasingly producing single “cash” crops, since they could then concentrate their efforts, make profits, and buy manufactured goods from mail order companies, such as the Aaron Montgomery Ward catalogue (first sent in 1872) or from Sears.
2. Large-scale farmers tried banking, railroading, and manufacturing, but new inventions in farming, such as a steam engine that could pull a plow, seeder, or harrow, the new twine binder, and the combined reaper-thresher sped up harvesting and lowered the number of people needed to farm.
 - Farmers, though, were inclined to blame banks and railroads for their losses rather than their own shortcomings.
3. The mechanization of agriculture led to enormous farms, such as those in the Minnesota-North Dakota area and the Central Valley of California.
 - Henry George described the state as a country of plantations and estates.
 - California vegetables and fruits, raised by ill-paid Mexican workers, made handsome profits when sold to the East.

XI. Deflation Dooms the Debtor

1. In the 1880s, when world markets rebounded, produced more crops,

and forced prices down, the farmers in America were the ones that found ruin.

2. Paying back debts was especially difficult in this deflation-filled time during which there was simply not enough money to go around for everyone. Less money in circulation was called “contraction.”
3. Farmers operated year after year on losses and lived off their fat as best they could, but thousands of homesteads fell to mortgages and foreclosures, and farm tenancy rather than farm ownership was increasing.
4. The fall of the farmers in the late 1800s was similar to the fall of the South and its “King Cotton” during the Civil War: depending solely on one crop was good in good times but disastrous during less prosperous times.

XII. Unhappy Farmers

1. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, droughts, grasshopper plagues, and searing heat waves made the toiling farmers miserable and poor.
2. City, state, and federal governments added to this by gouging the farmers, ripping them off by making them pay painful taxes when they could least afford to do so.
3. The railroads (by fixing freight prices), the middlemen (by taking huge cuts in profits), and the various harvester, barbed wire, and fertilizer trusts all harassed farmers.
4. In 1890, one half of the U.S. population still consisted of farmers, but they were hopelessly disorganized.

XIII. The Farmers Take Their Stand

1. In the Greenback movement after the Civil War, agrarian unrest had flared forth as well.
2. In 1867, the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, better known as The Grange, was founded by Oliver H. Kelley to improve the lives of isolated farmers through social, educational, and fraternal activities.
 - Eventually, it spread to claim over 800,000 members in 1875, and the Grange changed its goals to include the improvement of the collective plight of the farmer.
 - The Grangers found most success in the upper Mississippi Valley, and eventually, they managed to get Congress to pass a set of regulations known as the Granger Laws, but afterwards, their influence faded.
3. The Greenback Labor Party also attracted farmers, and in 1878, the Greenback Laborites polled over a million votes and elected 14 members of Congress.
 - In 1880, the Greenbackers ran General James B. Weaver, a Civil War general, but he only polled 3% of the popular vote.

XIV. Prelude to Populism

1. The Farmers' Alliance, founded in the late 1870s, was another coalition of farmers seeking to overthrow the chains from the banks and railroads that bound them.
 - However, its programs only aimed at those who owned their own land, thereby ignoring the tenant farmers, and it purposely excluded Blacks.
 - The Alliance members agreed on the (1) nationalization of railroads, (2) the abolition of national banks, (3) a graduated income tax, and (4) a new federal sub-treasury for farmers.

2. Populists were led by Ignatius Donnelly from Minnesota and Mary Elizabeth Lease, both of whom spoke eloquently and attacked those that hurt farmers (banks, railroads, etc.).
3. The Alliance was still not to be brushed aside, and in the coming decade, they would combine into a new People's Party (AKA, the Populist Party) to launch a new attack on the northeastern citadels of power.

XV. Coxey's Army and the Pullman Strike

1. The Panic of 1893 fueled the passion of the Populists. Many disgruntled unemployed fled to D.C. calling for change.
 - Most famous of these people was "General" Jacob Coxey. "Coxey's Army" marched on Washington with scores of followers and many newspaper reporters. They called for:
 - relieving unemployment by an inflationary government public works program.
 - an issuance of \$500 million in legal tender notes.
 - The march fizzled out when they were arrested for walking on the grass.
2. The Pullman Strike in Chicago, led by Eugene Debs, was more dramatic.
 - Debs helped organize the workers of the Pullman Palace Car Company.
 - The company was hit hard by the depression and cut wages by about 1/3.
 - Workers struck, sometimes violently.
 - U.S. Attorney General Richard Olney called in federal troops to break up the strike. His rationale: the strike was interfering with the transit of U.S. mail.
 - Debs went to prison for 6 months and turned into the leading Socialist in America.

XVI. Golden McKinley and Silver Bryan

1. McKinley
 - The leading Republican candidate in 1896 was William McKinley, a respectable and friendly former Civil War major who had served many years in Congress representing his native Ohio.
 - McKinley was the making of another Ohioan, Marcus Alonzo Hanna, who financially and politically supported the candidate through his political years.
 - McKinley was a conservative in business, preferring to leave things alone, and his platform was for the gold standard, even though he personally was not.
 - His platform also called for a gold-silver bimetallism—provided that all the other nations in the world did the same, which was not bound to happen.
2. Bryan
 - The Democrats were in disarray and unable to come up with a candidate, until William Jennings Bryan, the "Boy Orator of the Platte," came to their rescue.
 - At the 1896 Democratic Convention in Chicago, Bryan delivered a movingly passionate speech in favor of free silver. In this "Cross of Gold Speech" he created a sensation and won the nomination for the Democratic ticket the next day.
 - The Democratic ticket called for unlimited coinage of silver with the ratio of 16 silver ounces worth as much as one ounce of gold.
 - Democrats who would not stand for this left the party.
 - Some Democrats charged that they'd stolen the Populist ideas, and during the Election of 1896, it was essentially the "Demo-Pop" party.

XVII. Class Conflict: Plowholders Versus Bondholders

1. McKinley won decisively, getting 271 electoral votes, mostly from the populous East and upper Midwest, as opposed to Bryan's 176, mostly from the South and the West.
2. This election was perhaps the most important since the elections involving Abraham Lincoln, for it was the first to seemingly pit the privileged against the underprivileged, and it resulted in a victory for big business and big cities.
3. Thus, the Election of 1896 could be called the "gold vs. silver" election. And, put to the vote, it was clear then that Americans were going with gold.
4. Also in the election, the Middle Class preserved their comfortable way of life while the Republicans seized control of the White House of 16 more years.

XVIII. Republican Standpattism Enthroned

1. When McKinley took office in 1897, he was calm and conservative, working well with his party and avoiding major confrontations.
2. The Dingley Tariff Bill was passed to replace the Wilson-Gorman law and raise more revenue, raising the tariff level to whopping 46.5 percent.

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