

Chapter 17 Notes

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1 The West: Settlement of the Last Frontier

1. After the Civil War, Americans began settling in the West including
 - (a) the Great Plains
 - (b) the Rocky Mountains
 - (c) the Western Plateau
2. Before 1860, lands west of the Mississippi River were considered "the Great American Desert"
3. There were 250,000 American Indians living in the West in 1865
4. Taking over the west nearly exterminated the buffalo and seriously damaged the environment

1.1 The Cattle Frontier

1. Ranchers realized that they could continue the traditions of the cattle business in the late 1800's from the Mexicans
2. In the 1860's there were about 5 million head of cattle that roamed freely over the Texas grasslands
3. The Texas cattle business was easy to get into because both the cattle and the grass were free
4. Cattle drives began to end in 1880's because overgrazing destroyed grass and a winter blizzard and drought of 1885-1886 killed 90% of cattle
5. Also, homesteaders used barbed wire fencing to cut off access to the formerly open range
6. The wild west was largely tamed by the 1890's

1.2 The Farming Frontier

1. The Homestead Act offered 160 acres of public land free to any family that settled it for 5 years
2. 500,000 families took advantage of this act but 5 times as many families had to purchase their land
3. Homesteaders discovered that 160 acres was not adequate for farming the Great Plains due to
 - (a) Long spells of severe weather
 - (b) falling prices for their crops
 - (c) cost of new machinery
4. This caused the failure of two-thirds of the homesteader's farms
5. Those who survived used deep-plowing to use the moisture available and learned to plant hardy strains of Russian wheat that withstood extreme weather
6. Also, dams and irrigation saved many western farmers

2 American Indians in the West

1. In 1865, there were dozens of different cultural and tribal groups of American Indians.
2. Two-thirds of the western tribal groups lived in the Great Plains

2.1 Reservation Policy

1. In the 1830's, President Andrew Jackson's policy of removing eastern American Indians to the West was based on the belief that land west of the Mississippi would always remain "Indian country"
2. In 1851, the federal government began to assign the Plains tribes large tracts of lands known as reservations - with definite boundaries

2.2 Indian Wars

1. In the 19th century, the settlement of thousands of miners, ranchers, and homesteaders on American Indian lands lead to violence
2. Fighting between U.S. troops and Plains Indians was often brutal and the Army was responsible for several massacres
3. In 1866, Captain William Fetterman was wiped out by Sioux warriors
4. After these wars, there were more treaties that attempted to isolate Plains Indians to smaller reservations
5. Gold miners refused to stay off American Indians' lands
6. The Indian Appropriation Act of 1871 ended recognition of tribes as independent nations by the federal government
7. The constant pressure of the U.S. Army forced tribe after tribe to comply with Washington's terms
8. The slaughter of most of the buffalo by the early 1880's doomed the way of life of the Plains people
9. In the December of 1890, the U.S. Army gunned down more than 200 American Indian men, women, and children in the "battle" (massacre) of Wounded Knee in the Dakotas

2.3 Assimilationists

1. The book *A Century of Dishonor* by Helen Hunt Jackson created sympathy for American Indians, however, it also generated support for ending Indian culture through assimilation
2. Reformers advocated formal education, job training, and conversion to Christianity
3. Boarding schools taught American Indian children white culture, farming, and industrial skills

2.4 Dawes Severalty Act (1887)

1. This act was designed to break up tribal organizations which many felt kept American Indians from becoming "civilized" citizens
2. The act divided tribal lands into plots of up to 160 acres, depending on family size, U.S. citizenship was granted to those who stayed on the land for 25 years
3. The government distributed 47 million acres of land to American Indians, however, 90 million acres of former reservation land, often the best land, was sold over the years to white settlers by the government, speculators, or American Indians
4. The new policy failed and by the turn of the century, disease and poverty had reduced the American Indian population to just 200,000 persons