

CHAPTER 16

THE CONQUEST OF THE FAR WEST

Chapter Summary

Far from being empty and unknown, significant parts of what would become the western United States were populated by Indians and Mexicans long before the post-Civil War boom in Anglo-European settlement. Even after the waves of white occupation and in face of significant prejudice from those whites, large numbers of Mexicans and Asian Americans continued to live in the West.

White settlement developed in initial boom and decline patterns in three industries that would do much to shape the region in the long run: mining, ranching, and commercial agriculture. Asians, Mexicans, and African Americans provided much of the labor force for these industries.

In the late nineteenth century, the South and West were underdeveloped regions with an almost colonial relationship to the industrial, heavily populated Northeast and Midwest. Except for a few pockets in the far West, the frontier line of agricultural settlement in 1860 stopped at the eastern edge of the Great Plains. Hostile Plains Indians and an unfamiliar environment combined to discourage advance. By the end of the century, the Indian barrier to white settlement had been removed, cattlemen and miners had spearheaded development, and railroads had brought farmers, who, despite nagging difficulties, had made significant adaptations to the Great Plains.

Objectives

A thorough study of Chapter 16 should enable the student to understand

1. The cultural characteristics of the varied populations of the West.
2. The pattern of settlement on the last American frontier and the significance of the frontier in American history.
3. The impact of the discovery of gold and silver in the West, both on the region and on the nation as a whole.
4. The development of the cattle industry in the American Southwest after 1860.
5. The methods used by the federal government to reduce the threat of the Plains Indians and the Indians' ultimate fate.
6. The reasons for the transition from subsistence farming to commercial farming and the effect of the change on the West.
7. The "Turner Thesis," its supporters, and its critics.

Main Themes

1. The varied and vibrant ethnic and racial cultures that characterized the American West and how Anglo-European whites enforced their dominant role by the latter part of the nineteenth century.
2. The transformation of the far West from a sparsely populated region of Indians and various early settlers of European and Asian background into a part of the nation's capitalistic economy.
3. The closing of the frontier as Indian resistance was eliminated, miners and cowboys spearheaded settlements, and railroads opened the area for intensive development.
4. The development of mining, ranching, and commercial farming as the three major industries of the West.
5. The problems faced by farmers as the agricultural sector entered a relative decline.

AP US History
Chapter 16 Questions
Assignment 1

Sources:

Textbook: pg. 433 - 451.

Questions:

1. Describe the caste system that developed in the American Southwest under Spanish and Mexican rule. What role did the Pueblo Indians and other tribes play in this system?
2. List some of the characteristics of the culture of the Plains tribes, with particular emphasis on gender roles and the importance of the American bison, or buffalo.
3. What were the advantages and disadvantages that the Plains Indians had in their conflicts with white settlers? Why did the whites eventually prevail?
4. How did Anglo-American dominance affect the nature of Hispanic culture in New Mexico from the 1840s to 1900?
5. What factors led to the decline of Mexican-American economic and social dominance in California and Texas? What was the socio-economic status of most Mexican Americans by the end of the 19c?
6. Up to 1869, in what two fields did the greatest number of Chinese immigrants work?
7. How did employment tendencies, residence patterns, and social relationships change in the Chinese community later in the 19c?
8. Why was Anglo-European hostility toward the Chinese so high in California? What actions resulted from this hostility? How did the Chinese Americans respond?
9. What factors led to the massive increase in Anglo-European settlement of the Far West after the Civil War?
10. What was the vision of the Homestead Act? How was this vision flawed? What changes were made to try to remedy weaknesses in this act?
11. Describe the process of evolution from territory to state. What areas still lacked statehood by the turn of the century and why?
12. What was the composition of the western labor force? How was it shaped by racial prejudice and gender imbalance?
13. What was the typical pattern of development and decline in the western mining industry?
14. What was life like for the men and women who lived and worked in the mining regions?
15. What were the responses made by the Plains' settlers to the living conditions and challenges they encountered?
16. Describe the origins, purposes, and practices of the "long drive" and "open range" periods of the cattle industry.
17. What unique challenges did women settlers face in the West?
18. Why did women tend to gain the right to vote in the western states and territories before they did in the East?
19. What were the characteristics and functions of the Western cow town that emerged in the late 19c?
20. How did the transformation of the open-range ranch change the nature of the cattle industry on the Western frontier?

21. Why do the "new western historians" argue that Anglo-European Americans did not so much settle the West as conquer it? Is this a fair characterization of the course of events?
22. Why did many Americans view the West so romantically? Is this view still strong in the American character/psyche today?
23. How accurate was Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis about the American frontier?

AP US History
Chapter 16 Questions
Assignment 2

Sources:

Textbook: pg. 452 to mid-pg. 461.

Questions:

1. Describe the evolution of traditional national Indian policy up to the 1880s. What did these policies accomplish? How were the policies and their implementation flawed?
2. What happened to the great buffalo herds in the last half of the 19c? What role did the railroad play? How did this affect Native American life?
3. Explain the advantages and disadvantages that the Plains Indians had in their conflicts with white settlers? Why did white culture prevail?
4. How did the government's reservation policy help make way for the market economy?
5. Identify some of the major encounters/battles between Native Americans and white settlers/US Army at the end of the 19c.
6. What were some of the attempts on the part of whites to raise the American conscience to what was going on in the Great Plains?
7. What was the basic objective of the Dawes Severalty Act? How did it try to accomplish this goal?
8. What was the "Ghost Dance?" Why was it so threatening to the white community nearby?
9. Why has Wounded Knee, SD become a symbol in the struggle for Native American civil rights?
10. Why can it be said that the western railroads were essentially public projects, despite their private ownership?
11. How did the railroads stimulate settlement of the Great Plains?
12. How did Western farmers use invention, technology, and innovation to meet the challenges of Western settlement?
13. How were market forces changing the nature of American agriculture at the end of the 19c?
14. What were the main grievances of the late-19c farmer?