SESSION PREPARATION
Read the following material before attending the workshop. As you read the excerpts and primary sources, take note of the “Questions to Consider” as well as any questions you have. The activities in the workshop will draw on information from the readings and the video shown during the workshop.

UNIT INTRODUCTION
After Reconstruction, America experienced an “era of incorporation” with mass social movements, tremendous economic change, and national consolidation. Settlers migrated West and encountered landscapes of spectacular beauty, but faced daunting challenges in farming the arid land. Bitter conflicts also arose with Native Americans and Mexicans, who had occupied the land for centuries, over land ownership. After years of hardship, citizens became disgruntled with Republican policies and many turned to the Populist Party, whose ideas anticipated the development of the twentieth-century state.

UNIT LEARNING OBJECTIVES
After reading the text materials, participating in the workshop activities and watching the video, teachers will understand

• that Mexicans, Native Americans, and European Americans engaged in bitter conflicts over land ownership;
• how an emerging “environmental consciousness” contributed to the formation of a national park system;
• how “boosterism,” technology, and the idea of the “rain follows the plow” brought settlers to the “Great American Desert”;
• how the Populist Party laid the foundation for twentieth-century state-building.

THIS UNIT FEATURES
• Textbook excerpts (sections of U.S. history surveys, written for introductory college courses by history professors)
• Primary sources (documents and other materials created by the people who lived in the period) including advertisements, photographs, postcards, paintings, and a map
• A timeline at the end of the unit, which places important events in the era of incorporation
When Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner wrote the novel The Gilded Age, they intended it as a satire on the high society and corruption in Washington during Reconstruction. These themes were present in the era, but the Gilded Age was more complicated in that it was also an “era of incorporation” with mass social movements, tremendous economic change, and national consolidation. Between the 1880s and 1890s, the United States witnessed the rise of multinational corporations, the geographic incorporation of the former Confederacy and the West, and the integration of immigrants from all over the world.

The events of the Civil War were still fresh in the minds of Americans. People lived in the shadow of Southern secession and were conscious that the Union might fragment. As late as the election of 1896, there were real fears of secession when Western and Southern politicians disagreed with the Northeast on policy.

The American West was a place where the untamed wilderness could be mapped, given order, and then made useful, but settlers were unprepared to deal with the landscape and hardships that followed. Land was a precious commodity to be owned, harvested, sold, and developed, but farms on the arid parts of the Great Plains were not as productive as those in the East and South. To encourage westward development, the Republicans implemented policies to subsidize businesses that would indirectly help farmers, laborers, miners, and ranchers in claiming the arid West.

The settlers who moved West entered territory with a complex system of land ownership. Because they had already occupied the land for centuries, Native Americans and Mexicans each had their own ideas of land ownership and often came into conflict with Western settlers. Native Americans viewed the land as sacred, while European Americans proclaimed that the land was theirs for the taking. Based on the ideas of Manifest Destiny, European Americans continued to perpetuate the development of federal policy designed to take away Native American land.

During the late nineteenth century, many peoples encountered one another in the Southwest. Mexicans had moved into the West through a system of land grants—first through Spanish colonization and later with independent Mexico. The value of Mexican lands increased with greater railroad commerce throughout the region. At this point, Mexicans came into direct conflict with European American settlers from the East.

Displaced native inhabitants, struggling new settlers, and a clamoring for more direct government assistance were all unintended consequences of the Republican Party’s efforts to integrate and incorporate the nation after Reconstruction. After years of hardship and economic depression in the 1870s and 1890s, citizens grew dissatisfied with the Republican leadership, which resulted in a period of tight party competition that lasted until the mid-1890s. This led to an opening for alternative parties. The Populist Party became one of the most successful third parties in American history, and its ideas laid the foundation for twentieth-century politics.
Historical Perspectives

Historians have traditionally defined the era after Reconstruction as a “Gilded Age” of politics in American history, but this was a period that witnessed the rise of corporations, the geographic incorporation of the Confederacy and the West, and the integration of immigrants from all parts of the world.

The federal government focused on reviving the economy and unifying the nation into one “United States.” The establishment of transcontinental railroad routes and telegraph lines linked all regions of the nation economically and socially, but vast swaths of land in the interior and out West needed settlement and economic development. Republicans responded with policies that promoted development of the interior and westward expansion.

Westward expansion had some successes, but also produced unintended consequences for Republican policies. Many Americans considered the lands in the West a precious commodity and a source of great expectation, but the Great Plains proved to be less fertile than lands in the East. The newcomers required more capital to farm, ranch, and mine the land and sought direct assistance from the federal government.

When the railroad came into regions throughout the United States, it increased the value of the land because farmers and ranchers were able to transport produce and cattle on trains. Settlers moving west encountered Native Americans, and Mexican farmers and ranchers who had lived in the area for centuries. Conflicts arose over legal ownership of the land. Some Mexicans went through the legal system to retain their lands while others resisted incursion by more violent means.

Faces of America

Luna Kellie, a farmer and Populist; Zitkala-Sa, a Native American activist; and William Henry Jackson, a landscape photographer, represented the emergence of a forward-looking nation.

Like many families who migrated westward, Luna Kellie and her family settled in the Great Plains, a region previously known as the “Great American Desert.” The experience of the Kellie family revealed the hardships they endured while farming in Nebraska. As life on the frontier worsened, Kellie actively campaigned for a Populist Party victory in hopes that the ideas of the “People’s Party” would translate into policies that improved the living conditions on the Great Plains.

Gertrude Bonnin, also known as Zitkala-Sa or Red Bird, was a Yankton Sioux who attended White’s Manual Labor Institute, a boarding school designed to assimilate Native American children into white society. The school staff forced Zitkala-Sa to speak only English, wear European American clothes, and give up the spiritual practices of the Sioux. The experience at White’s Manual Labor Institute allowed Zitkala-Sa to bridge two cultures: the Native American and the European American.

In 1871, the United States Geological Survey set out to document the sources of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, and hired William Henry Jackson to photograph Yellowstone’s geologic features and landscapes. Business interests backed the survey, with the purpose of extending the Northern Pacific Railroad to transport produce, natural resources, and tourists.

Hands on History

How does the study of history help inform the restoration of ecosystems?

Sam Fuhlendorf, professor of rangeland ecology at Oklahoma State University, explains how history and biology intersect to show what an ecosystem “should” look like. At the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, Fuhlendorf describes the relationship between bison and fire in maintaining the landscape, and how he has used oral histories and journals to confirm what the prairie looked like before the arrival of European American settlers.
**Theme One**: The decades after Reconstruction brought bitter conflicts over land, resources, and labor—some of the most dramatic of which happened in the West.

**Overview**

On the Western frontier, a renewed race to claim land and resources led to battles among homesteaders, cattlemen, railroad owners, mine owners, and employees. At the same time, peoples native to the West—Native Americans and Mexican Americans—struggled to resist newcomers’ encroachment on their traditional lands.

With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, railroad companies sought rights-of-way through tribal lands to increase profits by transporting settlers, miners, and hunters to the West. As farmers settled the frontier, conflicts arose between the newcomers and Native Americans who had lived on these lands for centuries.

Legal conflicts erupted over who rightfully owned the land. In Mexican law, families passed land from one family member to another for hundreds of years. Communities, rather than individuals, held most of the common lands, and each member of the community could use it for grazing cattle or sheep and gathering firewood. In the United States, people bought land and acquired a written deed declaring ownership of the private property. When disputes arose between Mexicans and European Americans over who owned the land, the courts placed the lands on the open market if no individual property owner came forward with proof of ownership.

In the late 1880s, desperate Mexican American tenant farmers turned to violence to dispossess European Americans from their lands. Las Gorras Blancas (meaning “the white caps”) was an infamous but secretive brotherhood that openly objected to the changes in land ownership. They rode through the ranches of European Americans and elite Mexicans in white-hooded outfits, intimidated local farmers, burned barns, ripped open barbed wire fences, and freed the cattle in reaction to the seizure of their lands.

**Questions to Consider**

1. How did the expansion of the national economy contribute to these conflicts in the West?
2. How did the climate of the arid West contribute to the conflicts?
Moving Beyond Stereotypes of the Gilded Age

. . . The name [“Gilded Age”] itself evokes notions of crassness, superficiality, pretense, and fraud.

. . . [T]he term’s insinuation of selfishness and sham has masked the period’s enormous complexity and significance, and it has led to a facile dismissal of the era as somehow unworthy of serious study. In reality, of course, the United States experienced a profound transformation during these years, with lasting implications for the century that followed.

In the last generation, many historians have undertaken a reevaluation of the Gilded Age, not to deny the era’s problems but rather to assess their true nature. Indeed, the portrait emerging from this work shows the period to be one of substantial accomplishment. While not denying the greed and self-indulgence of many of the so-called robber barons, modern scholars emphasize their achievements in criss-crossing the nation with railroads, building factories, and transforming the country’s local and rural economy into a national, integrated, industrialized one. In agriculture, Americans achieved unheard of rates of production; indeed, it was the farmers’ very success that led to their economic difficulty—a paradox they still confront.

A byproduct of increased agricultural productivity was the abandonment of the countryside by many rural folk who, along with millions of European immigrants, swelled the population of rapidly growing cities. Much of the urban growth was unplanned and entailed a good deal of overcrowding, squalor, disease, and danger. Thought to be locked in the grasp of bosses, city government came in for severe criticism by contemporaries and later scholars. Again, new studies are changing this view. Evidence now indicates that, from the beginning, alongside the George Washington Plunkitts there were reformers and others who labored to make the cities livable through honest and fair government, creating water and sewage systems, lighted streets, public transportation, construction codes, libraries, and parks. Indeed, one recent study hails city government in the Gilded Age as an “unheralded triumph”.


By 1877 the emergence of a national rail system signaled the rise of big business. The railroad industry produced America’s first business bureaucracies, employing gigantic workforces to maintain, schedule, operate, and staff trains that traversed 93,000 miles of track. By 1890 the Pennsylvania Railroad had become the nation’s largest employer, with 110,000 workers on its payroll. About one out of seven people worked in the rail industry. The personnel in charge of coordinating these vast operations were among the country’s first professional, salaried managers . . .

The railroad industry was both a great centralizer and a great standardizer. Trains ran on schedules that were set by a central office, and those schedules relied on definitions of actual time that were standard throughout the nation. Moreover, trains broke down regional boundaries by transporting goods to all areas of the country. For the first time, trains carried brand-name goods and commodities to a national market. A California wheat farmer could purchase replacement parts for his McCormick reaper manufactured in Chicago. An Iowa farm family ordered a new cookstove through a mail-order catalogue. Levi-Strauss, a small clothier in San Francisco, shipped its famous denim pants to cowboys in Texas. Pillsbury Flour of Minnesota distributed its products to bakeries throughout the Midwest. Armour Meatpacking of Chicago sent its sausages to the East Coast. With the introduction of the new refrigerated railroad car, trains also began carrying larger loads of fruits and vegetables over longer distances. The new traffic in produce stimulated commercial agriculture in the South and on the West Coast. [Railroads also recruited people to come and settle lands west of the Mississippi. To encourage westward expansion, the government subsidized railroads by extending land ten to twenty miles on either side of the track right-of-way. The railroads recouped costs by selling the land to the new settlers and, at the same time, created the populations that would eventually use their railroads.]

**Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company**

**Questions to Consider**

1. How did uniform time zones create a more efficient railway system?
2. How did uniform time zones change Americans’ experience of time in their daily lives?

---

*Item 4282

*See Appendix for larger image – pg. 53*

---

**Creator:** The Passenger Department of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company

**Context:** Railroad route maps illustrated the national expansion of railroads to distribute goods and people much faster

**Audience:** Business people and regular passengers

**Purpose:** To show Burlington Northern’s railroad routes through the United States

**Historical Significance:**
Railroads were a force for modernization. By setting up uniform gauges and time zones, railroads made the national markets more efficient. As trains spread across the nation, so arose a need for standardization of time zones so that the trains ran on schedule. This was very important for business operations on opposite sides of the nation, and particularly for express businesses such as American Express and Wells Fargo that relied heavily on the railroads for the distribution of goods.
**Winter Crops from Sunny Texas**

**Question to Consider**
What idea does the title of the photograph convey?

![Winter Crops From Sunny Texas](image)

**Creator:** Unknown

**Context:** With westward expansion, a demand arose for the national distribution of goods

**Audience:** Advertisement targeting potential customers

**Purpose:** To show how express companies used the invention of refrigeration and the development of the railroad to distribute produce coast to coast

**Historical Significance:** Express companies provided the service of receiving and delivering letters, parcels, produce, and “anything and everything” throughout the nation. As railroad routes linked the United States, Wells Fargo increasingly rode the rails, and became the first nationwide express company in 1888. Wells Fargo was among the first express companies to ship fresh fruits and vegetables in refrigerated cars. The idea was so successful that, by 1918, Wells Fargo owned 175 refrigerated boxcars. Its “Ocean-to-Ocean” service connected more than 2,500 communities in 25 states. Wells Fargo rushed customers’ business from the urban centers of New York and New Jersey, through the rail hub of Chicago and farming regions of the Midwest, to ranching and mining centers in Texas and Arizona, and to lumber mill towns in the Pacific Northwest.

---

Item 6324
Unknown, WINTER CROPS FROM SUNNY TEXAS (1915). Photo used with permission from Wells Fargo, N. A.

*See Appendix for larger image – pg. 54*
### Alice’s Adventures in the New Wonderland, The Yellowstone National Park

**Question to Consider**
How does the artist convey the idea of a “Wonderland” worth visiting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creator:</th>
<th>Northern Pacific Railway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context:</td>
<td>Railroads promoted scenic routes to attract tourists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Potential railroad customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>To compete with other railroads by providing information and promoting the scenic routes of the Northern Pacific Railway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Historical Significance:**
In 1884, the Northern Pacific Railway launched an annual publication to compete with other railroads for potential travelers. The publications included illustrations, route maps, and descriptions of scenic tourist destinations. These publications represented the beginning of railroad tourism.

Alice’s Adventures in the New Wonderland was the title of the first two issues, making a reference to Lewis Carroll’s popular children’s book. The “New Wonderland” was Yellowstone National Park, which the federal government established as the world’s first national park in 1872.

---

Item 6370

See Appendix for larger image – pg. 55
2. Alterations in the Natural Environment

By stimulating manufacturing and extractive enterprises alike, the railroads powered these great environmental transformations, for better or worse. Trains enabled entrepreneurs to develop large-scale copper mines in Arizona, gigantic herds of longhorn cattle in Kansas, and vast textile mills in Georgia. Every western town clamored for a railroad station; they knew that places bypassed by the rails withered and died. The railroads enabled tourists to enjoy the beauty of western wilderness areas. Yet the railroads had an insatiable demand for lumber. Between the late 1870s and 1890, U.S. railroads accounted for 20 to 25 percent of all lumber consumed in the nation. They used wood for fuel, fences, trestles, and stations, along with countless railroad ties. In 1890 scientists estimated that the railroads would need 73 million board feet each year to make new ties to lay beneath expanding lines and to replace ties eaten by pests and decayed with age.

Since buffalo herds impeded rail travel, railroads promoted the shooting of buffalo from trains, a “sport” that almost eradicated the species. By the mid-1880s, the great herds had disappeared, victims of ecological change (the incursion of horses into grazing areas), disease (brucellosis spread by domestic livestock), and commercial enterprise. Eastern consumers prized buffalo-hide coats, and eastern factories used the hides to make steam-engine drive belts. Sioux leader Black Elk decried the slaughter and the “heaps of bones” left to rot in the sun.

Wood et al., 545.

3. Resolving the Indian Question

As farmers settled the western frontier and became entangled in a national economy, they clashed with the Indian tribes who lived on the land. In California, disease and violence killed 90 percent of the Native American population in the 30 years following the gold rush. Elsewhere, the struggle among Native Americans, white settlers, the U.S. Army, and government officials and reformers was prolonged and bitter. Although some tribes moved onto government reservations with little protest, most tribes, including the Nez Percé in the Northwest, the Apache in the Southwest, and the Plains Indians, resisted the attempts to curb their way of life and to transform their culture.

4. The White Perspective

When the Civil War ended, red and white men on the Plains were already at war. In 1864, the Colorado militia had massacred a band of friendly Cheyenne at Sand Creek, Colorado, despite the fact that Chief Black Kettle waved both a white flag of truce and an American flag. Militia leader John Chivington urged his men on. “Kill and scalp all, big and little.” Before long, Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho were responding in kind. The Plains wars had begun.

Although not all whites condoned the militia’s butchery, the deliberations of the congressional commission authorized to make peace revealed a constricted vision of the future of Native Americans. The commission, which included the commander of the army in the West, Civil War hero General William T. Sherman, accepted as fact that the future of the West lay in an “industrious, thrifty, and enlightened population” of whites. The commission believed that all Native Americans must relocate in one of two areas: Oklahoma and the western half of present-day South Dakota. There they would learn the ways of white society and agricultural and mechanical arts. Annuities, food, and clothes would placate the Indians and ease their transition from a “savage” to a “civilized” life.

At two major conferences in 1867 and 1868, Native American chiefs listened to these drastic proposals that spelled out the end of the traditional native life. Some agreed. Others, like Satanta, a Kiowa chief, insisted, “I don’t want to settle. I love to roam over the prairies.” In any case, the agreements extracted were not binding, because no chief had authority to speak for his tribe. For its part, the U.S. Senate dragged its feet in approving the treaties. Supplies promised to Indians who settled in the arid reserved areas failed to materialize, and wildlife proved sparse. These Indians soon drifted back to their former hunting grounds.

As General Sherman warned, however, “All who cling to their old hunting ground are hostile and will remain so till killed off.” When persuasion failed, the U.S. Army adopted militant tactics. “The more we can kill this year,” Sherman remarked, “the less will have to be killed the next war.” In 1867, Sherman entrusted General Philip Sheridan with the duty of dealing with the tribes. Sheridan introduced winter campaigning, which was aimed at seeking out the Indians who divided into small groups during the winter and exterminating them.

The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 added yet another pressure for “solving” the Indian question. Transcontinental railroads wanted rights-of-way through tribal lands and needed white settlers to make their operations profitable. They carried not only thousands of hopeful settlers to the
West, but miners and hunters as well. Few thought Native Americans had any right to the lands whites wanted.

In his 1872 annual report, the commissioner for Indian affairs, Francis Amasa Walker, addressed the two fundamental questions troubling whites: how to prevent Indians from blocking white migration to and settlement in the Great Plains and what to do with Native Americans once they had been controlled. Because they could mount 8,000 warriors, Walker suggested buying off the “savages.” With promises of food and gifts, he hoped to lure them onto reservations and there impose a “rigid reformatory discipline.”

Coercion would be necessary, because Indians, according to Walker, were “unused to manual labor, and physically unqualified for it by the habits of the chase . . . without forethought and without self control . . . with strong animal appetites and no intellectual tastes or aspirations to hold those appetites in check.” The grim reservations he proposed resembled prisons more than schools. Indians could not leave without permission and could be arrested if they tried to do so. Though Walker considered himself a “friend of humanity” and, like many reformers, wished to save the Indians from destruction, he said that there was only one choice: “yield or perish.”

Nash et al., 591.
5. The Tribal View

Native Americans defied such attacks on their ancient way of life and protested the wholesale violation of treaties. Black Elk remembered that, in 1863, when he was only three, his father had his leg broken in a fierce battle against the white men. “When I was older,” he recalled, “I learned what the fighting was about . . . Up on the Madison Fork the Wasichus had found much of the yellow metal that they worship and that makes them crazy, and they wanted to have a road up through our country to the place where the yellow metal was; but my people did not want the road. It would scare the bison and make them go away, and also it would let the other Wasichus come in like a river. They told us that they wanted only to use a little land, as much as a wagon would take between the wheels; but our people knew better.”

Black Elk’s father and many others soon realized that fighting was the only “way to keep our country.” But “wherever we went, the soldiers came to kill us.” Broken promises fired Indian resistance. [After the Sioux defeated the United States in the Great Sioux War of the 1860s, the federal government promised to give the Black Hills to the Sioux.] In 1875, the federal government allowed gold prospectors into the Black Hills, part of the Sioux reservation and one of their sacred places. Chiefs Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Rain-in-the-Face led the angry Sioux on the warpath. At the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876, they vanquished General George Custer. But their bravery and skill could not permanently withstand the power of the well-supplied, well-armed, and determined U.S. Army. Elsewhere, the pattern of resistance and ultimate defeat was repeated. In Texas, General Sherman vanquished Native American tribes, and in the Pacific Northwest, Nez Percé Chief Joseph surrendered in 1877 . . .

Nash et al., 591.
Why I Am a Pagan

Question to Consider
What does Zitkala-Sa believe in and how are her beliefs different from the “native preacher”?

The racial lines, which once were bitterly real, now serve nothing more than marking out a living mosaic of human beings. And even here men of the same color are like the ivory keys of one instrument where each represents all the rest, yet varies from them in pitch and quality of voice. And those creatures who are for a time mere echoes of another’s note are not unlike the fable of the thin sick man whose distorted shadow, dressed like a real creature, came to the old master to make him follow as a shadow. Thus with a compassion for all echoes in human guise, I greet the solemn-faced “native preacher” whom I find awaiting me. I listen with respect for God’s creature, though he mouth most strangely the jangling phrases of a bigoted creed.

As our tribe is one large family, where every person is related to all the others, he addressed me: —

“Cousin, I came from the morning church service to talk with you.”

“Yes,” I said interrogatively, as he paused for some word from me.

Shifting uneasily about in the straight-backed chair he sat upon, he began: “Every holy day (Sunday) I look about our little God’s house, and not seeing you there, I am disappointed. This is why I come today. Cousin, as I watch you from afar, I see no unbecoming behavior and hear only good reports of you, which all the more burns me with the wish that you were a church member. Cousin, I was taught long years ago by kind missionaries to read the holy book. These godly men taught me also the folly of our old beliefs.

“There is one God who gives reward or punishment to the race of dead men. In the upper region the Christian dead are gathered in unceasing song and prayer. In the deep pit below, the sinful ones dance in torturing flames.
“Think upon these things, my cousin, and choose now to avoid the after-doom of hell fire!” Then followed a long silence in which he clasped tighter and unclasped again his interlocked fingers.

Like instantaneous lightning flashes came pictures of my own mother's making, for she, too, is now a follower of the new superstition.

“Knocking out the chinking of our log cabin, some evil hand thrust in a burning taper of braided dry grass, but failed of his intent, for the fire died out and the half burned brand fell inward to the floor. Directly above it, on a shelf, lay the holy book. This is what we found after our return from a several days' visit. Surely some great power is hid in the sacred book!”

Brushing away from my eyes many like pictures, I offered midday meal to the converted Indian sitting wordless and with downcast face. No sooner had he risen from the table with “Cousin, I have relished it,” than the church bell rang.

Thither he hurried forth with his afternoon sermon. I watched him as he hastened along, his eyes bent fast upon the dusty road till he disappeared at the end of a quarter of a mile.

The little incident recalled to mind the copy of a missionary paper brought to my notice a few days ago, in which a “Christian” pugilist commented upon a recent article of mine, grossly perverting the spirit of my pen. Still I would not forget that the pale-faced missionary and the hoodooed aborigine are both God's creatures, though small indeed their own conceptions of Infinite Love. A wee child toddling in a wonder world, I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan.

6. Claiming and Managing the Land

. . . The Indian Removal Act of 1830 had authorized the federal government to use force in relocating the Five Civilized Tribes from the Southeast to newly designated “Indian Territory.” Survivors of the “trail of tears” reestablished native political and cultural institutions in the territory. Between 1830 and 1880, representatives of as many as 50 native groups had settled in this area, including tribes forced out of the Upper Midwest and refugees of the Plains Indian wars.

European American ranchers and farmers in nearby states coveted the fertile lands in Indian Territory. In 1889 President Benjamin Harrison opened to white settlement the unoccupied lands in the present state of Oklahoma . . . On April 22 of that year, as many as 60,000 settlers rushed in to claim parcels of land amounting to 2 million acres of the territory.

Congress established the Territory of Oklahoma in 1890, and three years later, the Cherokee Outlet in the north central part of the territory, combined with Tonkawa and Pawnee reservations, was thrown open to settlers and oil developers. On September 16, 1893, 100,000 people claimed 6.5 million newly opened acres in a single day. The “sooners,” people who rushed to claim the land, gave the state of Oklahoma its nickname. The “Sooner State” was admitted to the Union in 1907.

Wood et al., 608.
7. Overwhelming the Mexican Settlers

In the Southwest, in Texas, and in California, Americans encountered a Spanish-speaking population and Hispanic culture . . .

The greatest numbers of Spanish-speaking people lived in New Mexico, and, of all former Mexican citizens, they probably fared the best. Most were of mixed blood, living marginally as ranch hands for rich landowners or as farmers and herdsmen in small villages dominated by a patron, or headman. As the [nineteenth] century wore on, Americans produced legal titles and took over lands long occupied by peasant farmers and stock raisers. But despite economic reversals, New Mexicans survived, carrying their rural culture well into the twentieth century.

Light-skinned, upper-class landowners fared better. Even before the conquest, rich New Mexicans had protected their future by establishing contacts with American businessmen and by sending their sons east to American schools. When the United States annexed New Mexico [in 1848], this substantial and powerful class contracted strategic marriage and business alliances with the Anglo men slowly trickling into the territory. Only rarely did they worry about their poorer countrymen. Class interests outweighed ethnic or cultural considerations. . .

Some resisted American expansion into the Southwest. In New Mexico, members of Las Gorras Blancas ripped up railroad ties and cut the barbed-wire fences of Anglo ranchers and farmers . . .

For working-class Hispanic Americans, who became laborers for Anglo farmers or mining or railroad companies, the arrival of Anglos was the start of a steadily deteriorating situation. Whatever their employment, Hispanic Americans earned less and did more unpleasant jobs than Anglo workers. By 1870, the average Hispanic-Americans worker's property was worth only about one-third of what its value had been 20 years earlier.

Nash et al., 471–73.
8. Trouble on the Farm

In the late summer of 1878 the combined effects of the recent national depression and the loss of jobs to labor-saving technology catalyzed a rash of machine breaking throughout rural Ohio. The tactics of the machine-breakers bore some resemblance to those of las Gorras Blancas in northern New Mexico. In the Midwest, displaced farmhands burned the reapers, mowers, and threshers of their former employers. By autumn the violence had spread to Michigan and Indiana. Scattered reports of torched reapers, mowers, barns, and crops emanated from Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota also. Some wealthy farmers responded by abandoning their machinery and rehiring their farmhands. Technology, one noted, “ought to be dispensed with in times like these.” Critics charged the machine-breakers with “short-sighted madness.” True, seasonal farmhands were fast losing their usefulness in the new machine age. However, the protests revealed that even family farming had become a business. Now farmers needed to secure bank loans, invest in new machinery, and worry about the price of crops in the world market. These changes had profoundly altered labor relations between farm workers and farmers and between farmers and their creditors.

Wood et al., 586.

9. Class Conflict

. . . In the West, gold, copper, and silver miners faced daunting barriers to labor organization from within and outside their ranks. Protestants harbored suspicions of Roman Catholics. Ancient hatreds prevented the Irish from cooperating with the English. European Americans disdained Mexicans and the Chinese. However, the workers in Idaho’s Coeur d’Alene mines managed to overcome these animosities and strike for union recognition. In March 1892 mine owners in the region formed a “protective association” and slashed wages. When workers walked off the job, the owners imported strikebreakers from other areas of the West. The strikers retaliated by blowing up a mine with dynamite. Fifteen hundred state and federal troops arrived on the scene, and the resulting clash left seven miners dead. The troops confined 300 striking miners in bullpens, where they remained for several weeks before their trials. In this case, too, the strikers met with defeat. However, out of this conflict came a new organization, founded in Butte, Montana, in 1893: the Western Federation of Miners.

Wood et al., 618.
Conclusion
In the decades after Reconstruction, conflicts between homesteaders, cattlemen, railroads, mine owners, and employees took part in the race to claim land and natural resources. At the same time, westward expansion intensified and newcomers encroached upon the traditional lands of Mexicans Americans and Native Americans. This land grab led to clashes that often forced Native Americans onto reservations and pushed some Mexican Americans off their land, resulting in ways of life that disappeared.

Question to Consider
How did the consolidation of western lands reveal different cultural views about land ownership?
Theme Two: Landscapes in the arid West challenged newcomers’ assumptions about an endless, bountiful frontier.

Overview
Westward expansion created encounters with arid lands and breathtaking landscapes. More and more Americans recognized that their country’s natural resources were not infinite, sparking an emerging environmental consciousness. The federal government became directly involved in the preservation of land and protecting the endangered bison. In 1872, Congress established Yellowstone as the world’s first national park, to be forever “dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”

At the same time, scientists and government officials hoped that “rain will follow the plow” into the arid West; farmers eagerly headed west in hopes of making the desert bloom. But it soon became apparent that traditional agricultural methods could not succeed on arid lands, and tens of thousands of homesteaders suffered drought, low crop prices, hardship, and homelessness. By the 1880s and 1890s, farmers and ranchers drawn west by the Homestead Act and other incentives needed government assistance due to harsher conditions than expected.

Federal officials believed in providing indirect government assistance that created opportunities for success. Instead of subsidizing the railroad companies, farmers and ranchers wanted the government to provide direct assistance in the form of low-interest loans and regulation or take over of railroad and telegraph lines. Without government assistance, corporations took over farming, ranching, and mining because they had the capital needed to manage the new lands and resources.

Questions to Consider
1. What type of assistance did farmers, ranchers, and miners seek from the federal government?
2. What role did science play in westward expansion?
3. How did the idea for national parks first emerge?
“Rain Will Follow the Plow”

Question to Consider
Why is the plow the “unerring prophet”?

“In this miracle of progress, the plow was the unerring prophet, the procuring cause, not by any magic or enchantment, not by incantations or offerings, but instead by the sweat of his face toiling with his hands, man can persuade the heavens to yield their treasures of dew and rain upon the land he has chosen for his dwelling . . . The raindrop never fails to fall and answer to the imploring power or prayer of labor.”


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creator:</th>
<th>Charles Dana Wilber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context:</td>
<td>Railroad companies urged settlement of the West by migration to the Great Plains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Potential settlers and immigrants who considered moving to the Great Plains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>To draw settlers to the Great Plains by creating a theory that “rain will follow the plow”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Historical Significance:**
Charles Dana Wilber, an amateur scientist, wrote a book titled *The Great Valleys and Prairies of Nebraska and the Northwest* (1881), arguing that rainfall would increase as farmers moved westward. During the 1870s and 1880s, boosters wanted to see the area of the Great Plains increase in population. Wilber and other boosters sold the myth that the Great Plains would receive abundant rainfall by establishing the theory that, as farmers migrated westward, “rain will follow the plow.” The premise of the theory was that as more settlers came, the region would receive more rainfall, and the land would become more bountiful and productive. Wilber used this theory to encourage settlers to come to the Great Plains, a region that others referred to as the “Great American Desert.”
1. Exploiting Natural Resources

... The rapacious and rapid exploitation of resources combined with the increasing pace of industrialization made some Americans uneasy. Many believed that forests played a part in causing rainfall and that their destruction would have an adverse impact on the climate. Others, like John Muir, lamented the destruction of the country’s great natural beauty. In 1868, Muir came upon the Great Valley of California, “all one sheet of plant gold, hazy and vanishing in the distance... one smooth, continuous bed of honey-bloom.” He soon realized, however, that a “wild, restless agriculture” and “flocks of hoofed locusts, sweeping over the ground like a fire” would destroy this vision of loveliness. Muir became a preservation champion. [In 1872, President Grant established Yellowstone as a national park. Congress also attempted to protect bison, but Grant vetoed the legislation. In the 1890s, a fuller emergence of environmental consciousness took place with Muir’s national fame.] He played a part in the creation of Yosemite National Park in 1890, participated in a successful effort to allow President Benjamin Harrison to classify certain parts of the public domain as forest reserves (the Forest Reserve Act of 1891), and in 1892, established the Sierra Club...

[Jay Cooke, a railroad capitalist, wanted to further develop the Northern Pacific Railway westward to transport goods to new settlers, and ship their produce and natural resources to the rest of the country. He also came up with the idea that because the railroads went through extraordinarily spectacular landscapes—particularly in the area around Yellowstone and the northern Rockies—that he could use these landscapes to attract tourists. Jay Cooke’s idea was that, by increasing traffic along the railroad going to Yellowstone, more people would become excited about the idea of Yellowstone and some would settle, but others would become infected by the beauty of the landscape and support the further development of the West.]

Nash et al., 589.
Yellowstone National Park

**Question to Consider**
How did Moran’s watercolors contribute to an increasing environmental awareness?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creator:</th>
<th>Thomas Moran</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context:</td>
<td>An 1871 U.S. Geological expedition to survey the sources of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>U.S. Geological Survey, Congress, and (later) the general public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>To depict Yellowstone’s geologic features and landscapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Significance:</td>
<td>As part of a U.S. Geological Survey expedition, artist Thomas Moran spent forty days documenting the grandeur, beauty, and unique geologic features and landscapes at thirty different sites within the Yellowstone region. When supporters of making Yellowstone a national park presented his watercolors to Congress, the watercolors helped persuade many members of Congress of the value in preserving this landscape for future generations. Seven months after the Hayden Survey ended, Congress established Yellowstone National Park. By 1916, Congress established the National Park System.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Item 6798
*See Appendix for larger image – pg. 56*

Item 6799
Thomas Moran, **CRYSTAL FALLS** (1871). Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.  
*See Appendix for larger image – pg. 57*
## Yellowstone National Park

**Question to Consider**
How are Jackson's photographs similar to and different from Moran's watercolors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creator:</th>
<th>William Henry Jackson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context:</td>
<td>An 1871 U.S. Geological expedition to survey the sources of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>U.S. Geological Survey, Congress, and (later) the general public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>To photograph Yellowstone’s geologic features and landscapes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Historical Significance:**
William Henry Jackson was the photographer for Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden’s U.S. Geological Survey of the territories. Jackson worked closely with Moran to document parts of Wyoming, the Green River, and the Yellowstone region. Jackson’s photographs and Moran’s artwork helped persuade Congress to pass legislation establishing Yellowstone as the first national park in 1872.

*See Appendix for larger image – pg. 58*
Questions to Consider
1. Why did the Hayneses use postcards to market Yellowstone to potential tourists?
2. How did the Haynes’s postcards play a role in westward expansion?

Item 6145
F. Jay and Jack Haynes, POSTCARD OF OLD FAITHFUL GEYSER (ca. 1920).
Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.
See Appendix for larger image – pg. 59
Item 6146

See Appendix for larger image – pg. 60

Item 6147

See Appendix for larger image – pg. 61
Question to Consider
What is Austin’s perspective on desert life?

East away from the Sierras, south from Panamint and Amargosa, east and south many an uncounted mile, is the Country of Lost Borders.

Ute, Paiute, Mojave, and Shoshone inhabit its frontiers, and as far into the heart of it as a man dare go. Not the law, but the land sets the limit. Desert is the name it wears upon the maps, but the Indian’s is the better word. Desert is a loose term to indicate land that supports no man; whether the land can be bitted and broken to that purpose is not proven. Void of life it never is, however dry the air and villainous the soil . . .

Since this is a hill country one expects to find springs, but not to depend upon them; for when found they are often brackish and unwholesome, or maddening, slow dribbles in a thirsty soil. Here you find the hot sink of Death Valley, or high rolling districts where the air has always a tang of frost. Here are the long heavy winds and breathless calms on the tilted mesas where dust devils dance, whirling up into a wide, pale sky. Here you have no rain when all the earth cries for it, or quick downpours called cloud-bursts for violence. A land of lost rivers, with little in it to love; yet a land that once visited must be come back to inevitably. If it were not so there would be little told of it.

. . . Go as far as you dare in the heart of a lonely land, you cannot go so far that life and death are not before you. Painted lizards slip in and out of rock crevices, and pant on the white hot sands. Birds, hummingbirds even, nest in the cactus scrub; woodpeckers befriend the demoniac yuccas; out of the stark, treeless waste rings the music of the night-singing mockingbird . . .

If one is inclined to wonder at first how so many dwellers came to be in the loneliest land that ever came out of God’s hands, what they do there and why stay, one does not wonder so much after having lived there. None other than this long brown land lays such a hold on the affections. The rainbow hills, the tender bluish mists, the luminous radiance of the spring, have the lotus charm. They trick the sense of time, so that once inhabiting there you always mean to go away without quite realizing that you have not done it. Men who have lived

Creator: Mary Austin
Context: Mary Austin wrote in the context of the Progressive era, and favored environmental preservation and multicultural perspectives
Audience: Predominantly a male audience
Purpose: To describe the land and inhabitants of the California deserts
Historical Significance: The Land of Little Rain was a collection of fourteen literary pieces that became a classic in American nature writing, placing Mary Austin alongside Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Austin wrote descriptions of the desert regions of California that focused on the harshness of this natural environment and how plants, animals, and humans adapted to it. Austin also observed how European American, Hispanic, and Native American cultures interacted with the land.
there, miners and cattlemen, will tell you this, not so fluently, but emphatically, cursing the land and going back to it. For one thing there is the divinest, cleanest air to be breathed anywhere in God’s world. Some day the world will understand that, and the little oases on the windy tops of hills will harbor for healing its ailing, house-weary broods . . .

For all the toll the desert takes of a man it gives compensations, deep breaths, deep sleep, and the communion of the stars . . . It is hard to escape the sense of mastery as the stars move in the wide clear heavens to risings and settings unobscured. They look large and near and palpitant; as if they moved on some stately service not needful to declare. Wheeling to their stations in the sky, they make the poor world-fret of no account. Of no account you who lie out there watching, nor the lean coyote that stands off in the scrub from you and howls and howls.

2. Farmers on the Great Plains, 1865–1890s

Views of the agricultural possibilities of the Great Plains brightened after the Civil War, and railroads played a key role in transforming views of the region’s potential. Now that rail lines crossed the continent, they needed customers, settlers, and freight to make a profit. Along with town boosters and land speculators, also hoping to capitalize on their investments, railroads joined in extravagant promotional campaigns. “This is the sole remaining section of paradise in the western world,” promised one newspaper. “All the wild romances of the gorgeous orient dwindle into nothing when compared to the everyday realities of Dakota’s progress.” Propaganda reached beyond the United States to bring the message to Scandinavians, Germans, and others. Dismissing the fear that the plains lacked adequate rainfall to support cultivation, the promotional material assured readers that “All that is needed is to plow, plant, and attend to the crops properly; the rains are abundant.” Above average rainfall in the 1880s strengthened the case.

In the first boom period of settlement, lasting from 1879 to the early 1890s, tens of thousands of eager families moved onto the Great Plains and began farming. The majority came from Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. But like the Ebbesens, a substantial number of settlers were immigrants, making the Great Plains the second most important destination for foreign immigration. The greatest numbers came from Germany, the British Isles, and Canada, joined by smaller groups of Scandinavians, Czechs, and Poles. Unlike the single immigrant men flocking to American cities for work, these newcomers came with their families. From the beginning, they intended to put down roots in the new country.

Nash et al., 582.
LAND PROMOTION BOOKLET(S)

Questions to Consider
1. What was the appeal for Germans and Czechs to move to Nebraska?
2. Why do you think the publishers of these pamphlets targeted Czechs and Germans?

Item 4017
Burlington & Missouri River Railroad, Czech language land promotion booklet (1870s). Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

See Appendix for larger image – pg. 62
Item 4039

See Appendix for larger image – pg. 63
3. Farmers on the Great Plains, 1865–1890s

Some settlers established their farms by making claims under the provisions of the Homestead Act, which granted 160 acres to any family head or adult who lived on the claim for five years or who paid $1.25 an acre after six months of residence. Because homestead land was frequently less desirable than land held by railroads and speculators, however, most settlers bought land outright rather than taking up claims. The costs of getting started were thus more substantial than the Homestead Act would suggest. Western land was cheap compared with farmland in the East, but an individual farmer was fortunate if he could buy a good quarter section for under $500. The costs of machinery would often reach $700. Although some farmers thought it made better economic sense to lease rather than buy land, many rented only because they lacked the capital to purchase land and set up operations. In 1880, some 20 percent of the Plains farmers were tenants, and this percentage rose over time.

Achieving success on a Plains farm was much more difficult than promotional materials promised. Violent changes in the weather and temperature along with the scarcity of water and wood all demanded adjustments. Without firewood, farmers learned to burn corncobs and twisted straw for warmth. The log cabin, long the symbol of frontier life, was replaced by houses of sod “bricks.” Although from a distance such houses often looked like mounds of earth—“homely old things,” as Hattie Leeper described them—they frequently had glass windows, wooden shingles, and even plastered interiors. Dark and gloomy to our eyes, they were comfortable, cozy, and practical for the settlers. Walls two to three feet thick kept out the scorching summer heat and fierce cold of winter, the moaning winds, and the prairie fires. The solidity of the sod house provided a welcome contrast to the impersonal power and scale of nature.

Late-nineteenth-century industrial innovations helped settlers overcome some of the natural obstacles. The shortage of timber for fencing and housing had encouraged early emigrants to go elsewhere. But in the 1870s, Joseph Glidden developed barbed wire as a cheap alternative to timber fencing. Having seen a simple wooden device designed to keep animals away from fences at a country fair, Glidden thought of making fencing wire with similar protruding barbs. Before long, he and a partner were producing hundreds of miles of barbed wire fencing that could be used to enclose fields on the Plains. Other innovations overcame other challenges. Twine binders, which speeded up grain harvesting, reduced the threat of losing crops to the unpredictable weather. And mail-order steel windmills for pumping water from deep underground wells relieved some of the water shortages by the 1890s.
Industrial innovations, however, could not resolve all of the problems confronting Great Plains settlers. Wrote Miriam Peckham, a Kansas homesteader:

I tell you Auntie no one can depend on farming for a living in this country. Henry is very industrious and this year had in over thirty acres of small grain, 8 acres of corn and about an acre of potatoes. We have sold our small grain . . . and it come to $100; now deduct $27.00 for cutting, $16.00 for threshing, $19.00 for hired help, say nothing of boarding our help, none of the trouble of drawing 25 miles to market and 25 cts on each head for ferriage over the river and where is your profit. I sometimes think this a God forsaken country, the [grass]hopper hurt our corn and we have 1/2 a crop and utterly destroyed our garden. If one wants trials, let them come to Kansas.

Peckham’s letter highlights the uncertainties of frontier life: the costs of machinery, the vagaries of crops and markets, the threat of pests and natural disasters, the shortage of cash. Unlike earlier emigrants to the Far West, who had to finance the six-month trip, many Plains pioneers took up their homesteads with only a few dollars in their pockets. Survival often depended on how well families managed to do during the crucial first years and how much work each member of the family, including women and children, could perform. If they succeeded in raising and selling their crops, they might accumulate the capital needed to continue. But if nature was harsh or their luck or health bad, or if they were unable to adjust to new conditions or to do the hard labor that was necessary to get the farm going, the chances of failure grew . . .

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the first boom on the Great Plains halted abruptly. Falling agricultural prices cut profits. Then, the unusual rainfall that had lured farmers into the semiarid region near the hundredth meridian vanished. A devastating drought followed. One farmer reported in 1890 that he had earned $41.48 from his wheat crop, yet his expenses for seed and threshing amounted to $56.00. The destitute survived on boiled weeds, a few potatoes, and a little bread and butter. Many farmers had debts they now could not repay. Thousands lost their farms to creditors. Some stayed on as tenants. Homesteaders like the Leepers gave up. By 1900, two-thirds of homesteaded farms had failed. Many homesteaders fled east. In western Kansas, the population declined by half between 1888 and 1892. The wagons of those who retreated bore the epitaph of their experience: “In God We Trusted: In Kansas We Busted.”

Whether individual farmers remained on the Great Plains or retreated to more promising climates, collectively these new agricultural efforts had a significant
long-term impact on the region’s environment. When farmers removed sod to build their sod houses and broke the prairies with their plows to plant their crops, they were removing the earth’s protective covering. The heavy winds so common on the prairies could lift exposed topsoil and carry it miles away. Deep plowing, which was essential for dry farming techniques introduced after the drought of the 1880s, worsened this situation. The dust bowl of the 1930s was the eventual outcome of these agricultural interventions. Other less obvious consequences of farming and settlement on the Great Plains included a lowering of the water table level as mail-order steel windmills provided the power for pumping water from deep underground. Far from the Plains, the pine forests around the Great Lakes fell to satisfy the settlers’ need for wood and the railroads’ voracious appetite for railroad ties.

Nash et al., 582.
Question to Consider
How did the steel plow contribute to increased settlement of the West?

Historical Significance:
John Deere, an Illinois blacksmith and manufacturer, designed the first cast steel plow in 1837, which made it possible for the farmers on the Great Plains to plow the tough prairie ground. Known as “the Sod Buster,” Deere’s steel plow contributed to opening up the prairies for farming because it was able to cut through soil without clogging. Because the steel plow was able to cut through the soil easier, it did not need as much energy and could be pulled by horses instead of oxen. By 1855, John Deere was selling more than 10,000 steel plows a year.
THE NEW ECONOMY OF THE WEST, 1850–1893

Question to Consider
What economic activities were important in the West?

The New Economy of the West, 1850–1893
This map shows the importance of mining, ranching, and farming in the western part of the nation. Note the railroad links with the East.

Nash et al., 586.
4. The Cattleman’s West, 1860–1890

While the region of the Great Plains initially discouraged farmers, its grasses provided the foundation for the cattle kingdom. Mining discoveries in California and the Rocky Mountains established a market for meat. When cattlemen discovered before the Civil War that their animals could graze throughout the year on bunchgrass that accommodatingly turned into hay on its own, the future of the Great Plains for cattle raising became clear.

Although cattle raising dated back to Spanish mission days, the realization of the commercial possibilities for cattle ranching was partly a by-product of Union military strategy. During the war, the North had split the South, cutting Texas off from Confederate cattle markets. By the war’s end, millions of longhorns roamed the Texas range. The postwar burst of railroad construction provided a way of turning these cattle into dollars. If Texas ranchers drove their steers north to Abilene, Wichita, or Dodge City, they could be loaded on railroad cars for slaughtering and packinghouses in cities like Chicago and Kansas City. In the cattle drives of the late 1860s and 1870s, cowboys herded thousands of longhorns north with hefty profits for owners and investors.

Ranchers on the Great Plains bought some of the cattle and bred them with Hereford and Angus cows to create cattle able to withstand the region’s severe winters. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, huge ranches appeared in eastern Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana and in western Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. These ventures, many owned by outside investors, paid off handsomely. Because the cattle could roam at will over the public domain, they cost owners little as they fattened up but commanded good prices at the time of sale. The cowboys (one-third of them Mexican and black) who herded the steers, however, shared few of the profits. Their meager wages of $25 to $40 a month were just enough to pay for a fling in the saloons, dance halls, and gambling palaces in Dodge City or Abilene when taking the cattle to market.

By the mid-1880s, the first phase of the cattle frontier was ending as farmers moved onto the Plains, bought up public lands once used for grazing, and fenced them in. But the competition between cattle ranchers and farmers was only one factor in the cattle frontier’s collapse. Eager for profits, ranchers overstocked their herds in the mid-1880s. European investors added to the rush of capital into herding. Hungry cattle ate everything in sight, then weakened as grass became scarce. As was often the case on the Plains, the weather played an important role. A winter of memorable blizzards followed the very hot summer of 1886. Cattle, usually able to forage for themselves during the winter months, could
not dig through the deep snow to the grass and died from starvation. By spring, 90 percent of the cattle were dead. One observer reported seeing “countless carcasses of cattle . . . going down [a stream] with the ice, rolling over and over as they went, sometimes with all four stiffened legs pointing skyward. For days on end, tearing down with the grinding ice cakes, went Death’s cattle roundup.” Frantic owners dumped their surviving cattle on the market, getting $8 or even less per animal.

In the aftermath, the ranchers who remained stock raisers adopted new techniques. Experimenting with new breeds, they began to fence in their herds and to feed them grain during the winter. Since consumers were hungering for tender beef, these new methods suited the market. Ranching, like farming, was becoming a modern business.

Ranching altered the western landscape in ways that had immediate and future ecological consequences. As one Texan realized, “Grass is what counts. It’s what saves us all—as far as we get saved . . . Grass is what holds the earth together.” Seeing native species as either competing with cattle for nourishment or threatening them, ranchers hunted and killed antelope, elk, wolves, and other wildlife. When cattlemen overstocked the range, their herds devoured the perennial grasses. In their place, tough, less nutritious annual grasses sprang up, and sometimes even these grasses disappeared. Lands once able to support large herds of cattle eventually were transformed into deserts of sagebrush, weeds, and dust.

Nash et al., 580.
**Conclusion**

Westward expansion revealed landscapes of unfathomed beauty and unexpected hardship. Government officials and scientists of the period believed that as farmers arrived in the arid West; they would make the land productive. But traditional farming methods failed and thousands of homesteaders endured drought, low crop prices, hardship, and even homelessness. By the 1880s and 1890s, these farmers and ranchers pleaded for government subsidies, but the government only provided indirect assistance. Without government assistance, corporations took over. At the same time, an emerging environmental consciousness prompted the federal government to preserve wilderness areas and protect natural resources.

**Questions to Consider**

1. How did the birth of national parks show the changing role of the federal government in managing public lands?
2. Why was the federal government’s role in managing land significant?
Theme Three

Theme Three: The unintended consequence of Reconstruction policies was a call for a fairer and more humane economy, foreshadowing twentieth-century government reforms.

Overview
Displaced native inhabitants, struggling new settlers, and a clamoring for more direct government assistance were all unintended consequences of the Republican Party’s efforts to integrate and incorporate the nation after the Civil War. Amidst widespread hardship, bitter conflicts, and severe depressions in the 1870s and 1890s, many voters became disenchanted, largely on economic grounds, with the party of Union victory. As a result, Republicans lost their political dominance in the 1870s, and the subsequent two decades of national elections brought intense party competition and razor-thin margins of victory.

As the balance of power between the Republicans and Democrats narrowed, a window of opportunity opened up for other political parties, including the Greenback-Labor Party, Prohibitionists, Union Labor Party, and the United Labor Party. In this era of partisan stand-off, reformers created alternative parties to advance their vision of a stronger government that would help people in radical ways. Farmers sought direct federal action rather than indirect subsidies to business; however, policymakers and influential citizens feared that giving food and shelter to the needy would undermine the farmers’ willingness to work, and weaken the family structure.

The most significant of these third parties was the Populist, or People’s Party, that enjoyed a brief period of success by the 1890s. The Populist Party, composed primarily of farmers and laborers, laid the foundation for twentieth-century state-building by calling for stronger regulation of industry, public ownership of railroads and telegraphs, a progressive income tax to fund government services, and direct election of state senators.

The 1890s was a watershed moment in American politics. Up to this point, Republicans were the state-building party, but at this time the Democrats began to assume the role. It was the Populists that pushed the Democrats to become a more activist and people-oriented government.

Questions to Consider
1. How and why did the Populist Party emerge?
2. What did the Populist Party platform advocate?
3. Why were there different farmer’s alliance groups forming during this time?
The Lost World of Gilded Age Politics

. . . From the 1830s to the 1890s, political parties dominated American politics. Voters believed that there were important ideological differences between the major parties. The Gilded Age Republican Party billed itself as the party of nationalism, prosperity, and moralism. Compared to its Democratic counterpart, the GOP was the party of activist, big government. It had saved the Union during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Likewise, it promoted a prosperous national economy through neo-mercantilist legislation. Because Republicans relied substantially upon the support of White Anglo-Saxon northern Protestants, it was the party of America’s “host culture,” a status which supporters believed conferred upon it the proprietary right to define true Americanism and proper conduct. The Democratic Party, in turn, was the party of Jeffersonian small government, non-interventionist laissez faire economic policies, states’ rights, and personal liberties. Its adherents endorsed the Jacksonian concept that government activism primarily helped the few at the expense of the many and that local government served the interests of citizens better than centralized national power. Democrats received most of their support from a diffuse range of ethnic and cultural “outgroups,” such as recent immigrants and white southerners. These groups felt threatened by the homogenizing influence of federal authority. Party loyalty for both Democrats and Republicans became an act of group identity . . .

At the national level, the Gilded Age was a period of party equilibrium, or stalemate. Between 1876 and 1892, no president received a majority of the popular votes. Either the loser got more, or a third party received enough votes to prevent a majority victory. Both occurred in 1888. Between 1875 and 1897, the same party controlled the presidency and both houses of Congress for only four years: Republicans from 1889 to 1891 and Democrats from 1893 to 1895. Both mandates were sharply reversed at the next congressional election. The sustained political equilibrium of the period suggests Americans were sharply divided, but engaged and committed to the democratic process. The common voter understood that his ballot really mattered.

Despite the partisan stalemate of Gilded Age politics, Republicans seemed in charge of the national government most of the time. Economic policy making lay at the center of political contention. Republicans had set the agenda on economic policy during the Civil War . . .

. . . Urban political machines emerged by mid-century as vehicles for conciliating group diversity. Bosses dispensed a whole range of services to the needy,
including food, intercession with the authorities, and jobs on city construction projects. They expected little more than partisan loyalty and a blind eye to corruption in return. Despite the constant attacks of moralistic reformers, urban machines survived well into the twentieth century. This was partly because immigration dissipated only with World War I and partly because bosses and machines provided social services to those most in need.

During the Gilded Age, politics had been a national obsession. Men of all races, social backgrounds, ethnicities, and economic status overwhelmingly participated, and in relatively equal proportions. Gilded Age political parties took strong, sometimes ideological, stances on the major issues of the day. This was particularly true on the fundamental issue of the proper role of government in the nation’s economic and social life. Rallies, parades, barbecues, and popular speakers both entertained and educated the masses. As H. Wayne Morgan has noted, if high voter participation and a thorough airing of the issues can be used as a gauge, the Gilded Age was a very democratic period in American history. Corruption, the shabby treatment of racial minorities, and the exclusion of women from the electoral process, of course, were the major blots on this record. Some level of corruption, however, has always been with us and racial minorities would fare even worse in the early twentieth century.

Certainly many politicians were pro-business; and most Americans had not come to the conclusion that government had a major responsibility to solve social problems. Economic depression, labor turmoil, and the angry intensity of the Populist Revolt would significantly affect both perceptions and would play major roles in destroying the Gilded Age political system.

Gift for the Grangers

Questions to Consider
1. How was the Grange movement related to the Populist Party?
2. How was the Grange movement important in the rise of third parties?

Creator: J. Hale Powers & Company

Context: The Grange movement organized in response to the plight of farmers and economic depressions

Audience: Farmers who were Grange members

Purpose: To show Grange membership and farmer's pride

Historical Significance:
In 1867, Oliver Kelley founded the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry to organize white farmers. It originated as a social and cultural organization, but evolved to become the political organization known as the National Grange. By 1875, about 800,000 farmers had joined to voice their economic discontent. In the 1870s, this chromolithograph was sold to farmers to hang in their parlors or other home decor as a sign of Grange membership. The scenes show domesticity, labor and fruitfulness, prosperity, good government, and community. Some of these scenes show eighteenth-century dress, suggesting not the present day, but a rich heritage from the American past.

Item 5450
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

See Appendix for larger image – pg. 65
1. Formation of the People’s Party, 1892

Farmers knew all too well that government did not support them. In February 1892, the People’s, or Populist, party was established with Leonidas Polk, president of the National Farmers Alliance, as its presidential candidate. “The time has arrived,” he thundered, “for the great West, the great South, and the great Northwest, to link their hands and hearts together and march to the ballot box and take possession of the government . . . and run it in the interest of the people.” But by July, at the party convention in Omaha, Polk had died. Reflecting its Midwestern and southern alliance roots, the party nominated James B. Weaver, Union army veteran from Iowa, as its standard bearer and James G. Field, a former Confederate soldier, for vice president.

The Omaha demands, drawn from the Ocala platform of 1890, were greatly expanded. They included more direct democracy (popular election of senators, direct primaries, the initiative and referendum, and the secret ballot) and several planks intended to enlist the support of urban labor (the eight-hour day, immigration restriction, and condemnation of the use of Pinkerton agents as an “army of mercenaries . . . a menace to our liberties”). The new party also endorsed a graduated income tax, the free and unlimited coinage of silver at a ratio of 16 to 1 (meaning that the U.S. Mint would have to buy silver for coinage at one-sixteenth the current, official price of the equivalent amount of gold), and government ownership of railroads, telephone, and telegraph. “The time has come,” the platform said, “when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads.”

Populists attempted to widen political debate by promoting a new vision of government activism to resolve farmers’ problems. But the obstacles they faced were monumental: weaning the South from the Democrats, encouraging southern whites to work with blacks, and persuading voters of both parties to abandon familiar political ties. Since many Alliance members were reluctant to follow their leaders into the third party, the Populists had to create the political machinery for a major electoral campaign.

The new party pressed ahead. Unlike the major-party candidates in 1892, Weaver campaigned actively. In the South, he faced egg- and rock-throwing Democrats, who raised the cry of “nigger rule” and fanned racial fears in opposing his efforts to include blacks in the People’s party. Despite hostile opposition, Weaver won over 1 million popular votes (the first third-party candidate to do so), and he carried four states (Kansas, Colorado, Idaho, and Nevada) and parts of two others (Oregon and North Dakota), for a total of 22 electoral votes.

The Populists’ support was substantial but regional, coming from western miners and mine owners who favored the demand for silver coinage and from rural Americans from the Great Plains. But the People’s party failed to break the Democratic stranglehold on the South, nor did it appeal to city workers of
the Northeast who were suspicious of the party’s anti-urban tone and its desire for higher agricultural prices (which meant higher food prices). Perhaps most damaging, the Populists made little inroads on Midwestern farmers, who owed fewer debts and were relatively more prosperous than farmers elsewhere and saw little value in the Omaha platform. Farmers who were better integrated into their world tended to believe they could work through existing political parties. Although the Populists were not yet finished, most discontented farmers in 1892 voted for Cleveland and the Democrats, not for the Populists.

Nash et al., 664.

2. The Depression of 1893

Though winning the election, Cleveland soon faced a difficult test. No sooner had he taken office than began one of the worst depressions ever to grip the American economy, lasting from 1893 to 1897. Its severity was heightened by the growth of a national economy and global economic interdependence. The depression started in Europe and spread to the United States as overseas buyers cut back on their purchases of American products. Shrinking markets abroad soon crippled American manufacturing. Foreign investors, worried about the stability of American currency after passage of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, dumped some $300 million of their securities in the United States. As gold left the country to pay for these securities, the nation’s money supply declined. At the same time, falling prices hurt farmers, many of whom discovered that it cost more to raise their crops and livestock than they could make in the market. Workers fared no better: wages fell faster than the price of food and rent.

The collapse in 1893 was also caused by an overextension of the domestic economy, especially in railroad construction. Farmers, troubled by falling prices, planted more, hoping the market would pick up. As the realization of overextension spread, confidence faltered, then gave way to financial panic. When Wall Street crashed early in 1893, investors frantically sold their shares, companies plunged into bankruptcy, and disaster spread. People rushed to exchange paper notes for gold, further reducing gold reserves and confidence in the economy. Banks called in loans, which by the end of the year led to 16,000 business bankruptcies and 500 bank failures.

The capital crunch and diminished buying power of rural and small-town Americans (still half the population) forced massive factory closings. Within a year, an estimated 3 million Americans—20 percent of the workforce—lost their jobs. People fearfully watched tramps wandering from city to city looking for work. “There are thousands of homeless and starving men in the streets,” one young man reported from Chicago, indicating that he had seen “more misery in this last week than I ever saw in my life before.” . . .
Despite the magnitude of despair during the depression, national politicians and leaders were reluctant to respond. Mass demonstrations forced some city authorities to provide soup kitchens and places for the homeless to sleep. But when an army of unemployed led by Jacob Coxey marched on Washington in the spring of 1894 to press for public work relief, its leaders were arrested for stepping on the Capitol grass. Cleveland’s reputation for callousness worsened later that summer when he sent federal troops to Chicago to crush the Pullman strike.

The president focused on tariff reform and repeal of the Silver Purchase Act, which he blamed for the depression. Although repeal was ultimately necessary to reestablish business confidence, in the short run, Cleveland only worsened the financial crisis, highlighted the silver panacea, and hurt conservative Democrats. With workers, farmers, and wealthy silver miners alienated, voters abandoned the Democrats in droves in the midterm elections of 1894, giving both Populists and Republicans high hopes for 1896.

Nash et al., 666.
3. The New Shape of American Politics

[The presidential victory in 1896 followed a huge Republican landslide in 1894, which was a watershed election because voters chose the Republicans to respond to the depression.] The landslide Republican victory broke the stalemate in post–Civil War American politics. Republicans dropped their identification with the politics of piety and strengthened their image as the party of prosperity and national greatness, which gave them a party dominance that lasted until the 1930s. The Democrats, under Bryan’s leadership until 1912, put on the mantle of Populist moralism, but were largely reduced to a sectional party, reflecting southern views on money, race, and national power. The 1896 election demonstrated that the Northeast and Great Lakes states had acquired so many immigrants that they now controlled the nation’s political destiny. The demoralized Populists disappeared, yet within the next 20 years, many Populist issues (e.g., direct election of senators, direct primaries, graduated income tax, woman suffrage, and others) were adopted by the two major parties.

Another result of the election of 1896 was a change in the pattern of political participation. Because the Republicans were so dominant outside of the South, and Democrats were so powerful in the South, few states had vigorous two-party political battles and therefore had less reason to mobilize large numbers of voters. With results so often a foregone conclusion, voters had little motivation to cast a ballot. Many black voters in the South, moreover, were disfranchised, and middle-class good government reformers were not as effective as party bosses in turning out urban voters. The tremendous rate of political participation that had characterized the nineteenth century since the Jackson era gradually declined. In the twentieth century, political involvement among poorer Americans lessened considerably, a phenomenon unique among western democracies.

Nash et al., 675.
**Theme Three**

**Conclusion**
In this era of partisan stand-off, reformers formed new political parties to further their ideas of a stronger government that would help people in radical ways. By the 1890s, the most significant of these was the Populist Party. Composed primarily of farmers and laborers, the ideas of Populist Party foreshadowed the development of the twentieth-century state and contributed to making the Democrats a more activist party aimed at helping people. Thus, the 1890s was a turning point in American political history because the Democrats began to assume the role as a state-building party that the Republicans had previously claimed.

**Questions to Consider**
1. What difference did the Populist Party make to the dominant two-party political system?
2. How were the Populists and their platform responsible for shaping our current political system?
3. Why was the development of the Populist Party a landmark event in American history?

**Unit Conclusion**
During westward expansion, settlers encountered unfathomed beauty, unexpected hardship, and lands belonging to others. Having lived off the land for centuries, Native Americans and Mexicans each had their own ideas of land ownership that came into conflict with Western settlers. Clashes often forced Native Americans onto reservations and pushed some Mexican Americans off their land, resulting in ways of life that disappeared.

Westward expansion also brought the recognition that America’s resources were finite and sparked an emerging environmental consciousness that prompted Congress to pass legislation preserving wilderness areas and protecting natural resources.

Settlers hoped that the “rain would follow the plow” into the arid West, but traditional farming methods failed and homesteaders suffered drought, low crop prices, hardship, and even homelessness. By the 1880s and 1890s, farmers and ranchers pleaded for government assistance. Instead, the government provided indirect assistance to business.

Displaced native inhabitants, struggling new settlers, and a clamoring for more direct government assistance were all unintended consequences of the Republican Party’s efforts to integrate and incorporate the nation after the Civil War.

Citizens grew dissatisfied with the Republican leadership, and a window of opportunity opened up for other political parties. The most significant of these third parties was the Populist, or People’s Party, that enjoyed a brief period of success by the 1890s. Composed primarily of farmers and laborers, the Populist Party laid the foundation for twentieth-century state-building and contributed to making the Democrats a more activist party aimed at helping people.
**Timeline**

1862 President Abraham Lincoln signs the Homestead Act. A homesteader had only to be the head of a household and at least 21 years of age to claim a 160 acre parcel of land. Each homesteader had to live on the land, build a home, make improvements, and farm for five years. A filing fee of $8 was the only money required.

1871 The Hayden Expedition, under direction of the U.S. Geological Survey, sets out to survey the sources of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers.

1872 William Henry Jackson’s photographs of the Yellowstone region help persuade the United States Congress to pass legislation establishing Yellowstone as the first national park.

1875 The federal government allows gold prospectors into the Black Hills of South Dakota, a sacred region of the Sioux reservation.

1876 The Battle of Little Big Horn

1877 A comprehensive national rail system emerges; Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce surrenders

1879 The Bureau of Indian Affairs’s first official boarding school is established as the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania; the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroads arrive in Las Vegas, Nevada; the first boom period of settlement in the West begins, lasting into the early 1890s

1881 Charles Dana Wilber publishes *The Great Valleys and Prairies of Nebraska and the Northwest*, introducing the theory of “rain follows the plow.” Wilber argues that rainfall will increase as farmers plow the new western lands.

1887 Juan Jose Herrera, with his brothers Pablo and Nicanor, establish the vigilante group Las Gorras Blancas, or “the white caps.” Las Gorras Blancas were opposed to the barbed-wire fencing of communal ranch lands by Anglos, elite Mexican settlers, and immigrants. They used methods of property destruction and intimidation to quell western settlement on their ancestral lands.

1888 Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa) is sent to White’s Manual Labor Institute in Wabash, Indiana.

1889 President Benjamin Harrison opens the “unoccupied” lands in the present state of Oklahoma to white settlement and immigration.

1890 The Pennsylvania Railroad becomes the nation’s largest employer; Chief Justice James O’Brien of the Territory of New Mexico dismisses indictments against accused members of Las Gorras Blancas in Las Vegas, New Mexico.
1891 The Court of Private Land Claims begin to oversee land disputes in New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona.

1892 The People’s [Populist] Party is established with Leonidas Polk as president of the National Farmers Alliance, as well as the party’s presidential candidate.

1893 One of the worst depressions ever to grip the economy of the United States begins, lasting to 1897; 100,000 people claim 6.5 million newly opened acres of land in present-day Oklahoma in a single day, lands that had previously been occupied by Native Americans.

1900 Two-thirds of homesteaded farms have failed; many homesteaders return to eastern states.

1925 Luna Kellie writes her memoirs on the reverse sides of old ornate red and gold Farmers Alliance certificates.

1926 Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa) starts the National Council of American Indians.
UNIT REFERENCE MATERIALS


**Further Reading**


5- Nebraska State Farmer’s Alliance. Constitution for the Nebraska State Farmer’s Alliance 9th Annual Meeting, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1890. Lincoln, NE: The Alliance Publishing Co., 1890.


**Visit the Web Site**

Explore these themes further on the America’s History in the Making Web site. See how this content aligns with your own state standards, browse the resource archive, review the series timeline, and explore the Web interactives. You can also read full versions of selected Magazine of History (MOH) articles or selected National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) lesson plans.
Unknown, *Winter Crops From Sunny Texas* (1915). Photo used with permission from Wells Fargo, N. A.
APPENDIX 2-1

THREE TWO PRIMARY SOURCE
Item 6799
APPENDIX 2-3

THEME TWO PRIMARY SOURCE
Item 6800
William Henry Jackson, LOWER FALLS OF THE YELLOWSTONE (n.d.).
Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.
Appendix 2-4

Theme Two Primary Source
Item 6145
F. Jay and Jack Haynes, POSTCARD OF OLD FAITHFUL GEYSER (ca. 1920).
Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.
Appendix 2-5
APPENDIX 2-6


THEME TWO PRIMARY SOURCE
Item 6147

Appendix 2-6
Appendix 2-7

Theme Two Primary Source
Item 4017
Burlington & Missouri River Railroad, CZECH LANGUAGE LAND PROMOTION BOOKLET (1870s). Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.
THEME TWO PRIMARY SOURCE
Item 4039
Burlington & Missouri River Railroad,
GERMAN LANGUAGE LAND
PROMOTION BOOKLET (1881).
Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.
APPENDIX 2-9
THEME THREE PRIMARY SOURCE
Item 5450
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.