The Great West and the Agricultural Revolution 1865-1890

Theme: After the Civil War, whites overcame the Plains Indians' fierce resistance and settled the Great West, bringing to a close the long frontier phase of American history.

Theme: The farmers who populated the West found themselves the victims of an economic revolution in agriculture. Trapped in a permanent debtor dependency, in the 1880s they finally turned to political action to protest their condition. Their efforts culminated in the Populist Party's attempt to create an interracial farmer/labor coalition in the 1890s, but William Jennings Bryan's defeat in the pivotal election of 1896 signaled the triumph of urbanism and the middle class.

Summary:

At the close of the Civil War, the Great Plains and Mountain West were still occupied by Indians who hunted buffalo on horseback and fiercely resisted white encroachment on their land and way of life. But as the whites' railroads, mining, and livestock broke up Indian territory, while diseases undercut their strength and numbers. A cycle of environmental destruction and intertribal warfare eventually overcame Indian resistance and soon threatened Native Americans' very existence. The federal government combined a misconceived "treaty" program with intermittent warfare to force the Indians onto largely barren reservations.

Attempting to coerce Indians into adopting white ways, the government passed the Dawes Act, which eliminated tribal ownership of land, while often-insensitive "humanitarians" created a network of Indian boarding schools that further assaulted traditional culture.

The mining and cattle frontiers created colorful chapters in western history. Farmers carried out the final phase of settlement, lured by free homesteads, railroads, and irrigation. The census declared the end of the frontier in 1890, concluding a formative phase of American history. The frontier was less of a "safety valve" than many believed, but the growth of cities actually made the West the most urbanized region of the United States by the 1890s.

Beginning in the 1870's, farmers began pushing into the treeless prairies beyond the 100th meridian, using techniques of dry farming that gradually contributed to soil loss. Irrigation projects, later financed by the federal government, allowed specialized farming in many areas of the arid West, including California. The "closing" of the frontier in 1890 signified the end of traditional westward expansion, but the Great West remained a unique social and environmental region.

As the farmers opened vast new lands, agriculture was becoming a mechanized business dependent on specialized production and international markets. Once declining prices and others woes doomed the farmers to permanent debt and dependency, they began to protest their lot, first through the Grange and then through the Farmers' Alliances, the prelude to the People's (Populist) party.

The major depression of the 1890s accelerated farmer and labor strikes and unrest, leading to a growing sense of class conflict. In 1896 pro-silverite William Jennings Bryan captured the Democratic party's nomination, and led a fervent campaign against the "goldbug" Republicans and their candidate William McKinley. McKinley's success in winning urban workers away from Bryan proved a turning point in American politics, signaling the triumph of the city, the middle class, and a new party system that turned away from monetary issues and put the Republicans in the political driver's seat for two generations.

Kev Terms:

the reservation system
Sand Creek Massacre
Fetterman Massacre
Sitting Bull
Little Big Horn
Nez Perce
Chief Joseph
Geronimo
buffalo
Helen Hunt Jackson
Battle of Wounded Knee

Dawes Severalty Act
Plains Indians
Comstock Lode
boomtowns
Silver Senators
Long Drive
Wild Bill Hickok
Homestead Act of 1862
Joseph F. Glidden
sooners/eighty-niners
Montgomery Ward

bonanza Farms
Patrons of Husbandry
Granger Laws
Greenback Labor Party
Farmers' Alliance
Colored Farmers' National
Alliance
Mary Elizabeth Lease

Populist

Thought Provokers:

- 1. How did the "whites" finally **overcome resistance of the Plains Indians**, and what happened to the Indians after their resistance ceased?
- 2. What social, ethnic, environmental, and economic factors made the **trans-Mississippi West** a unique region among the successive American frontiers?
- 3. What factors made western **farmers economically vulnerable** even as they were expanding their agricultural production in the Great West?
- 4. Read "Varying viewpoints" on page 621. -How do "modern scholars" differ in opinion from Turner's famous "Frontier Thesis?"

Identification	Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.			
	1.	Major northern Plains Indian nation that fought and eventually lost a bitter war against the U.S. Army1876-1877		
	2.	Southwestern Indians led by Geronimo who were finally conquered and forced to settle in Oklahoma		
	3.	Generally poor areas where vanquished Indians were eventually confined under federal control		
	4.	Indian religious movement, originating out of the sacred Sun Dance that the federal government attempted to stamp out in 1890		
	5.	Federal law that attempted to dissolve tribal landholding and establish Indians as individual farmers		
	6.	Huge silver and gold deposit that brought wealth and statehood to Nevada		
	7.	General term for the herding of cattle from the grassy plains to the railroad terminals of Kansas, Nebraska, and Wyoming		
	8.	Federal law that offered generous land opportunities to poorer farmers but also provided the unscrupulous with opportunities for hoaxes and fraud		
	9.	Improved type of fencing that enabled farmers to enclose the land on the treeless plains		
	10.	Former "Indian Territory" where "sooners" tried to get the jump on "boomers" when it opened for settlement in 1889		
	11.	Third political party that emerged in the 1890s to express rural grievances and mount major attacks on the Democrats and Republicans		
	12.	3		
	13.	Bitter labor conflict in Chicago that brought federal intervention and the jailing of union leader Eugene V. Debs		
	14.			
	15.	*		

Matching People, Places and Events

Match the person, place or event in the left column with the proper description in the right column by inserting the correct letter on the blank line.

1. Sand Creek, Colorado	A. Ohio industrialist and organizer of					
2 Little Die Horn	McKinley's victory over Bryan in the election of 1896					
2. Little Big Horn						
3. Sitting Bull	B. Leader of the Nez Perce tribe who conducted a brilliant but unsuccessful military campaign in 1877					
4. Chief Joseph	C. Author of the popular pro-silver pamphlet "Coin Financial School"					
5. Geronimo	D. Former Civil War general and Granger who ran as the Greenback Labor party candidate for					
6. Helen Hunt Jackson	president in 1880 E. Leader of the Sioux during wars of 1876-					
7. John Wesley Powell	1877					
8. William Hope Harvey	F. Explorer and geologist who warned that traditional agriculture could no succeed west of the 100 th meridian					
9. Eugene V. Debs	G. Leader of the Apaches of Arizona in their warfare with the whites					
10. James B. Weaver	H. Site of Indian massacre by militia forces in 1864					
11. Mary E. Lease	I. Massachusetts writer whose books aroused sympathy for the plight of the Native Americans					
12. Mark Hanna	J. Site of the serious but temporary U.S. Army defeat in the Sioux War of 1876-1877 K. Railway union leader who converted to socialism while serving jail time during the Pullman strike L. Eloquent Kansas Populist who urged farmers to "raise less corn and more hell"					
Putting Things in Order Put the following events in correct order by n	umbering them from 1 to 5.					
	a major railroad strike and the intervention of federal					
troops in Chicago The violation of agreements with the Dakota Sioux leads to a major Indian war and a military						
disaster for the U.S. calvary	·					
	d to farmers at token prices, thus encouraging the rapid					
settlement of the Great West.						
The U.S. Census Bureau declares that there was no longer a clear line of frontier settlement						
ending a formative chapter of American history						
Despite a fervent campaign by their charismatic young champion, pro-silver Democrats lose a pivotal election to "Gold Bug" Republicans						

Matching Cause and Effect

Match the historical cause in the left column with he proper effect in the right column by writing the correct letter on the blank line.

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	•	11	C	Ω

1. The encroachment of white settlement and the violation of treaties with Indians
2. Railroad building, disease, and the destruction of the buffalo
3. Reformers' attempts to make Native Americans conform to white ways
4. The coming of big business mining and stock raising to the West
5. "Dry farming", barbed wire, and irrigation
6. The passing of the frontier of 1890
7. The growing economic specialization of western farmers
8. The rise of the Populist Party in the early 1890s
9. The economic depression that began in 1893
10. The return of prosperity after 1897 and new gold discoveries in Alaska, South Africa, and

Effect

elsewhere

- A. Caused widespread protests and strikes like the one against the Pullman Company in Chicago
- **B.** Threatened the two-party domination of American politics by the Republicans and Democrats
- C. Created new psychological and economic problems for a nation accustomed to a boundlessly open West
- **D.** Ended the romantic, colorful era of the miners' and their cattlemen's frontier
- E. Decimated Indian populations and hastened their defeat at the hands of advancing whites
- **F.** Effectively ended the free-silver agitation and the domination of the money question in American politics
- G. Made settlers vulnerable to vast industrial and market forces beyond their control
- **H.** Made it possible to farm the dry, treeless areas of the Great Plains and the West
- I. Further undermined Native Americans' traditional tribal culture and morale
- **J.** Led to nearly constant warfare with Plains Indians from 1868 to about 1890

ANSWERS:

Identification:

1. Sioux	Matching People, Places,	Putting Things in Order:
2. Apaches	Events:	3, 5, 2, 1, 4
3. reservations	1. H	
4. Ghost Dance	2. J	Matching Cause and Effect:
5. Dawes Severalty Act	3. E	1. J
6. Comstock Lode	4. B	2. E
7. long drive	5. G	3. I
8. Homestead Act	6. I	4. D
9. barbed wire	7. F	5. H
10. Oklahoma	8. C	6. C
11. Populists (People's Party)	9. K	7. G
12. Coin's Financial School	10. D	8. B
13. Pullman strike	11. L	9. A
14. Cross of Gold speech	12. A	10. F
15. "gold bugs"		