Chapter 26
The Great West and the Agricultural Revolution, 1865–1896
I. The Clash of Cultures on the Plains

• Clash of the Indians and advancing white pioneers:
  – Migration and conflict:
    • The Comanches drove the Apaches off the central plains into the upper Rio Grande valley in 18th century
    • Harried by the Mandans and Chippewas, the Cheyenne had abandoned their villages along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers a century before the Civil War
    • The Sioux, displaced from the Great Lakes woodlands 18th century emerged onto the plains to prey upon the Crows, Kiowas, and Pawnees.
I. The Clash of Cultures on the Plains (cont.)

– White soldiers and settlers on the plains:
  • They accelerated a fateful cycle of fierce enmities among the Indians
  • Ultimately undermined the foundations of Native American culture
  • They spread cholera, typhoid, and smallpox among the native peoples of the plains, with devastating results
  • They put pressure on the steadily shrinking bison population by hunting and by grazing their own livestock on the prairie grasses.
I. The Clash of Cultures on the Plains (cont.)

– The federal government:
  • Tried to pacify the Plains Indians by signing treaties with “chiefs” of various “tribes” at Fort Laramie (1851) and at Fort Atkinson (1853)
  • The treaties marked the beginnings of the reservation system in the West:
    – They established boundaries for the territory of each tribe
    – Attempted to separate the Indians into great “colonies” to the north and south of a corridor of intended white settlement.
    – The white treatymakers:
      » Misunderstood both Indian government and Indian society.
I. The Clash of Cultures on the Plains (cont.)

» “Tribes” and “chiefs” were often fictions of white imagination

» Many Native Americans recognized only the authority of their immediate families or a band elder

» The nomadic culture of the Plains Indians was utterly alien to the concept of living out one’s life in the confinement of a defined territory.

• In the 1860s the federal government intensified this policy and herded the Indians into still-smaller confines:
  – Principally the “Great Sioux reservation” in the Dakota Territory and Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma)
The Clash of Cultures on the Plains (cont.)

– The Indians surrendered their ancestral lands:
  • Only when they had received solemn promises from Washington:
    – They would be left alone
    – They would be provided food, clothing, and other supplies
    – Regrettably the federal Indian agents were often corrupt
  • For more than a decade after the Civil War:
    – Fierce warfare between the Indians and the U.S. Army raged in various part of the West (see Map 26.1)
    – Many Army troops were immigrants
    – Fully 1/5 of all U.S. Army personnel were African American—dubbed “Buffalo Soldiers”.
II. Receding Native Population

– The Indian wars in the West were often savage clashes:

• At Sand Creek, Colorado (1864), Colonel J.M. Chivington’s militia massacred 400 Indians
• Women were shot praying for mercy
• Children had their brains dashed out
• Braves were tortured, scalped, and unspeakably mutilated
• Cruelty begot cruelty
• “Fetterman’s annihilation” was massive and violent slaughter by the Indians against whites.
II. Receding Native Population (cont.)

• The Fetterman massacre led to one of the few-though short-lived-Indian triumphs in the plain wars:
  – The **Battle of the Little Bighorn**

• Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868):
  – the government abandoned the Bozeman Trail
  – “Great Sioux reservation” was guaranteed to the Sioux Tribes

• 1874 another round of warfare with the Plains Indians
  – Custer led a “scientific” expedition into the Black Hills, South Dakota and announced he had found gold
  – Hordes of greedy gold-seekers swarmed in Sioux lands
  – The Sioux, the Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians took to the warpath, inspired by Sitting Bull.
II. Receding Native Population (cont.)

– General Custer’s 7th Cavalry

- Set out to suppress the Indians
- Return them to the reservation
- He attacked 2,500 well-armed warriors along the Little Horn river, present day Montana
- The “White Chief with Yellow Hair” and 250 officers and men were completely wiped out in 1876
- The Indians’ victory was short-lived
- The U.S. Army hunted down the Indians who had humiliated Custer.
II. Receding Native Population (cont.)

• In 1877 a band of Nez Perce Indians in northeastern Oregon were goaded into flight
  – When the U.S. authorities tried to herd them onto a reservation
  – Chief Joseph surrendered with his 700 Indians after a tortuous, 1,700 mile 3-month trek across the Continental Divide toward Canada
  – The Nez were sent to a dusty reservation in Kansas, where 40% perished from disease
  – The survivors were eventually allowed to return to Idaho.

• Fierce Apache tribes of Arizona and New Mexico were the most difficult to subdue
  – Led by Geronimo they were pursued into Mexico by federal troops
II. Receding Native Population (cont.)

– The federal troops used the sunflashing heliography, a communication device that impressed the Indians as “big machine”

– Scattered remnants of the warriors were finally persuaded to surrender after the Apache women had been exiled to Florida

– The Apaches ultimately became successful farmers in Oklahoma

• The relentless fire-and-sword policy of the whites at last shattered the spirit of the Indians:
  » The vanquished Indians were finally ghettoized on reservations:
  » Where they could preserve their cultural autonomy; eke out a sullen existence as wards of the government.
II. Receding Native Population (cont.)

• The “taming” of the Indians was engineered by:
  – The federal government’s willingness to back its land claims with military force
  – The railroad, which shot an iron arrow through the heart of the West
  – Locomotives could bring out unlimited numbers of troops, farmers, cattlemen, shepherders, and settlers
  – They were ravaged by the white people’s disease, to which they showed little resistance, and by firewater, which they could resist even less
  – The virtual extermination of the buffalo doomed the Plains Indians’ nomadic way of life.
III. Bellowing Herds of Bison

• Buffalo—
  – Tens of millions—described as “hunchback cows”—blackened the western prairies, when white Americans first arrived:
    • These shaggy, lumbering animals were the staff of life for Native Americans (see pp. 528-583):
      – Their flesh provided food
      – Their hides provided clothes, lariats, and harnesses
      – Their dried dung provided “buffalo chips”
    • When the Civil War ended there were 15 million of these meaty beasts still grazing on the western plains.
III. Bellowing Herds of Bison (cont.)

• Effect of the railroads:
  – Had sometimes to wait up to 8 hours a herd of buffalo to cross the tracks
  – Much of the food supply for the railroad construction gangs came from leathery buffalo steaks
  – William “Buffalo Bill” Cody killed over 4,000 animals in 18 months while employed by the Kansas Pacific

• With the building of the railroad:
  – The massacre of the herds began in deadly earnest
  – The creatures were slain for their hides, tongues
  – “Sportsmen” on lurching railroad trains leaned out the windows and blazed away at the animals
II. Bellowing Herds of Bison (cont.)

– This wholesale butchery left fewer than a thousand buffalo alive by 1885
– The once-numerous beasts were in danger of complete extinction
– The whole story is a shocking example of the greed and waste that accompanied the conquest of the continent.
IV. The End of the Trail

• By the 1880s the national conscience began to stir uneasily over the plight of the Indians:
  – Helen Hunt Jackson:
    • Pricked the moral sense of Americans in 1881 in *A Century of Dishonor*:
      – The book chronicled the sorry record of government ruthlessness and chicanery in dealing with the Indians
    • *Ramona* (1884):
      – A love story about discrimination against California Indians
      – Inspired sympathy for the Indians
IV. The End of the Trail (cont.)

- Debate seesawed:
  - Humanitarians wanted to treat the Indians kindly and persuade them to “walk the white man’s road”
  - Hard-liners insisted on the current policy of forced containment and brutal punishment
    - Neither side showed much respect for Native American culture
- Christian reformers:
  - Often administered educational facilities on the reservations
IV. The End of the Trail (cont.)

- Sometimes withheld food to force Indians to give up their tribal religions and assimilate to white society
- In 1884 zealous white souls joined with the military to successfully persuade the federal government to outlaw the sacred Sun Dance

— Battle of Wounded Knee:
  - In 1880 when the “Ghost Dance” cult spread to the Dakota Sioux, the army bloodily stamped it out
  - In the fighting, an estimated 200 men and women, and children were killed
  - As well as 29 invading soldiers
IV. The End of the Trail (cont.)

• **Dawes Severalty Act (1887):**
  – The misbegotten offspring of the movement to reform Indian policy:
  – Reflecting the forced-civilization reformers’ view
    • The act dissolved many tribes as legal entities
    • Wiped out tribal ownership of the land
    • Set up individual Indian family heads with 160 free acres
    • If the Indians behaved themselves like “good white settlers” they would get full title to their holdings
    • As well as citizenship, in twenty-five years.
IV. The End of the Trail (cont.)

– Former reservation land not allotted to the Indians under the Dawes Act:
  • Was to be sold to railroads and white settlers
  • With the proceeds used by the federal government to educate and “civilize” the native peoples:
    – In 1879 the government funded the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania where Native American children:
      » Were separated from their tribes
      » Were taught English
      » Were inculcated with white values and customs.
    – In 1890s the government expanded its network of Indian boarding schools:
The End of the Trail (cont.)

– Sent “field matrons” to the reservations:
  » To teach Native American women the art of sewing
  – To preach the virtues of chastity and hygiene.

– The Dawes Act:
  • Struck directly at tribal organization:
    – Tried to make rugged individualists out of the Indians
    – It ignored the inherent reliance of traditional Indian culture on tribally held land
    – By 1900 Indians had lost 50% of the 156 million acres they held (see Map 26.2)
  • The forced-assimilation doctrine of the Dawes Act remained the cornerstone of the government.
The End of the Trail (cont.)

- The Indian Reorganization Act (the “Indian New Deal) of 1934:
  - Partially reversed the individualistic approach
  - And belatedly tried to restore the tribal basis of Indian life (see p. 765)
  - The Indian population started to mount slowly:
    - The total number had been reduced by 1887 to about 243,000—the results of bullets, bottles, bacteria—
    - But the census of 2000 counted more than 1.5 million Native Americans, urban and rural.
The Indian Removal Act of 1830 eliminated all Indian land rights east of the Mississippi River.

The Dawes Act in 1887 changed common tribal lands into individual allotments. Nearly 90 million acres of tribal land were lost before the act was repealed in 1932. Since then, through court battles and federal recognition of old claims, some Indian lands have been restored to the tribes.
V. Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker

- Conquest of the Indians and the coming railroads were life-giving boons to the mining frontier:
  - The golden gravel of California continued to yield “pay dirt”
  - In 1858 an electrifying discovery convulsed on Colorado
    - Avid “fifty-niners” or “Pikes Peakers” rushed to the Rockies
    - There were more miners than minerals,
    - Many gold-grubbers with “Pikes Peak or Bust” inscribed on their coverer wagons going, but creaking back it was “Busted, by Gosh.”
V. Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker (cont.)

- Some stayed on to strip away the silver deposits
- Others to extract nonmetallic wealth from the earth in the form of golden grain.

• “Fifty-niners” also poured into Nevada in 1859:
  - After the fabulous Comstock Lode had been uncovered
  - Fantastic amount of gold and silver worth about $340 million was mined by the “Kings of the Comstock” 1860-1890
  - The scantily populated state of Nevada, “child of the Comstock Lode”:
    » Was prematurely railroaded into the Union 1864
    » Partly to provide three electoral votes for President Lincoln.
V. Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker (cont.)

• Montana, Idaho, and other western states:
  – “Lucky strikes” drew frantic gold and silver seekers
  – Boomtowns, known as “Helldorados” sprouted up on the desert sands
  – Every third cabin was a saloon
  – Lynch law and hempen vigilante justice tried to preserve a crude semblance of order
  – When the “diggings” petered out, the gold-seekers decamped, leaving “ghost towns”—Virginia City, Nevada.
  – Begun with a boom, these towns ended with a whimper.

• The age of business came to the mining industry:
  – Impersonal corporations with costly machinery and trained engineers replaced the former miners and mining.
  – The once-independent gold-washer became just another day laborer.
V. Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker (cont.)

• The mining frontier played a vital role in conquering the continent:
  – Magnetlike, it attacked population and wealth
    • While advertising the wonders of the Wild West
  – Women and men found opportunities
    • Running boardinghouses or working as prostitutes
    • With frontier equality they won the right to vote:
      – Wyoming (1869), Utah (1870), Colorado (1893), Idaho (1896)—long before their sisters in the East could cast a vote.
V. Mining: From Dishpan to Ore Breaker (cont.)

– The amassing of precious metals:
  • Helped finance the Civil War
  • Facilitated the building of railroads
  • Intensified the already bitter conflict between whites and Indians
  • Enabled the Treasury to resume specie payments (1879)
  • Injected the silver issue into American politics.

– The mining frontier added to American folklore and literature: Bret Harte and Mark Twain.
VI. Beef Bonanzas and the Long Drive

• Problem of marketing on the Plains:
  – How to get the cattle to market:
    • The transcontinental railroads into the West
    • Cattle could now be shipped alive to the stockyards
    • Under “beet barons” like Swifts and Armours:
      – Highly industrialized meatpacking business sprang into existence as a main pillar of the economy
      – Using the gigantic stockyards at Kansas City and Chicago, the meatpackers shipped the fresh products to the East Coast in newly perfected refrigerator cars.
VI. Beef Bonanzas and the Long Drive (cont.)

– A spectacular feed of the new slaughterhouses was the “Long Drive” (see Map 26.3)

• Texas cowboys—black, white, and Mexican drove herds: 1 to 10 thousand over the unfenced and unpeopled plains to a railroad terminal
• The brawling beasts grazed en route on the free government grass
• Favorite terminal points were fliespecked “cow town”
• The steer was king in a Cattle Kingdom richly carpeted with grass. Lush grass—the Long Drive profitable.
VI. Beef Bonanzas and the Long Drive (cont.)

• The railroad made the Long Drive, and the railroad unmade the Long Drive

• The same rails that bore the cattle from the open range brought out the homesteader and sheepherder
  – Both of these intruders were too numerous to be cut down by the cowboys
  – The terrible winter of 1886-1887 left thousands of dazed cattle starving and freezing

• Overexpansion and overgrazing took their tolls, as the cowboys slowly gave way to plowboys
  – The only escape for the stockmen was to make cattle-raising a big business and avoid the perils of overproduction.
VI. Beef Bonanzas and the Long Drive (cont.)

- Breeders learned:
  - To fence their ranches
  - Lay in winter feed
  - Import blooded bulls
  - Produce fewer and meatier animals
  - To organize: The Wyoming Stock-Growers’ Association (1880s) virtually controlled the state and its legislature.

• The heyday of the cowboys:
  - The equipment of the cowhand served a useful purpose
  - He could justifiably boast of his toughness
  - These bowlegged Knights of the Saddle became part of American folklore.
  - Many of them were blacks, who enjoyed the newfound freedom of the open range.
VII. The Farmers’ Frontier

• It was the sober sodbuster who wrote the final of frontier history:
  • **Homestead Act (1862):**
    – It allowed a settler to acquire as much as 160 acres of land (a quarter-section) by living on it for five years, improving it, and paying a nominal fee of about $30.
  • Marked a drastic departure from previous policy:
    – Before the act, public land had been sold for revenue
    – Now it was to be given away to encourage a rapid filling of empty space:
      – To provide a stimulus to the family farm—”the backbone of democracy.”
VII. The Farmers’ Frontier (cont.)

- It was a godsend to a host of farmers who could not afford to buy large holdings:
- About a million families took advantage of the Homestead Act to carve out new homes
- Yet five times that many families purchased their land from the railroads, the land companies, or the states (see Figure 26.1).

- The Homestead Act often turned out to be a cruel hoax
  - The standard 160 frequently proved inadequate on the rain-scarce Great Plains
  - Thousands of homesteaders were forced to give up the one-sided struggle against drought
VII. The Farmers’ Frontier (cont.)

– Fraud spawned the Homestead Act and similar laws:
  » Ten times more landing in the hands of land-grabbers
  » Unscrupulous corporations used “dummy” homesteaders to grab the best properties
  » Settlers would later swear that they had “improved” the property by erecting a “twelve by fourteen” dwelling, which turned out to measure twelve by fourteenth inches.

• The railroads played a major role in developing the agricultural West:
  – Largely through the profitable marketing of crops
  – The railroad companies induced Americans and European immigrants to buy the cheap land
VII. The Farmers’ Frontier (cont.)

- “Sodbusters” built homes from the very sod they dug from the ground and burned corncobs for warmth
- Some pushed farther onto the poor, marginal lands beyond the 100th meridian
- The area separated two climatological regions:
  » A well-watered area to the east
  » A semiarid area to the west (see Map 26.4)
- Many broke west of the 100th meridian

• “Dry farming” took root on the plains:
  – Method of shallow cultivation supposedly adapted to the arid western environment
  – But over time “dry farming” created a finely pulverized surface soil
  – Contributed to the notorious “Dust Bowl” (see p. 764).
VII. The Farmer’s Frontier (cont.)

– Other adaptations to the western environments were more successful:

• Tough strains of wheat were imported from Russia
• Wise farmers abandoned corn for sorghum and grains
• Barbed wire, perfected by Joseph F. Glidden (1874), solved the problem of building fences on the treeless plains
• Federally financed irrigation projects caused the Great American Desert to bloom:
  – Arching dams tamed the Missouri and Columbia Rivers
VII. The Farmer’s Frontier (cont.)

- Forcing the canyon-gnawing Colorado to dry
- Some 45 million acres were irrigated in 17 western states

• It was the hydraulic engineers who had more to do with shaping the modern West:
  - Than all the trappers, miners, cavalrmen, and cowboys (see Map 26.5).
VIII. The Far West Comes of Age

• The Great West experienced a fantastic surge in migration from 1870s to 1890s:
  – Parade of new western states joined the union:
    • Colorado, 1876—“the Centennial State”
    • Mormon Church banned polygamy in 1890
    • Utah in 1896
    • Oklahoma, “the Beautiful Land:”
      – Scores of overeager and well-armed “sooners” illegally ended Oklahoma Territory
      – They had to be evicted repeatedly by federal troops
VIII. The Far West Comes of Age (cont.)

– All was ready legally on April 22, 1889 and some 50,000 “boomers” were poised expectantly on the boundary line.
– At noon the bugle shrilled, and a horde of “eighty-niners” poured in on lathered horses or careening vehicles.
– That night the city of Guthrie, with over 10,000 people was born.
– End of 1889, Oklahoma boasted 60,000 inhabitants, and Congress made it a territory.
– In 1907 it became the “Sooner State.”
IX. The Fading Frontier

• In 1890—a watershed date:
  – The superintendent of the census announced:
    • That for the first time in America’s experience, a frontier line was no longer discernible
    • The “closing” of the frontier inspired one of the most influential essays ever written about American history
      – Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in 1893 (see pp. 592-593)
  – The secretary of war had prophesied in 1827 that five hundred years would be needed to fill the West:
IX. The Fading Frontier (cont.)

• The nation soon recognized that its land was not inexhaustible:
  – Seeds were planted to preserve the vanishing resources
  – Government set aside land for national parks—first Yellowstone in 1872, followed by Yosemite and Sequoia in 1890

• The frontier was more than a place
  – It was also a state of mind; a symbol of opportunity
  – Its passing ended a romantic phrase of the nation’s internal development
  – Created new economic and psychological problems.

• The frontier a “safety valve:”
  – The theory is that when hard times came, the unemployed who cluttered the city pavements merely moved west, took up farming, and prospered.
IX. The Fading Frontier (cont.)

• Truth about the “safety valve” is:
  – Few city dwellers migrated to the frontier during the depressions
  – Most didn’t know how to farm
  – Few of them could raise enough money to transport themselves west
  – And then pay for livestock and expensive machinery.

• Does have some validity:
  – Free acreage did lure to the West a host of immigrants farmers
  – The very possibility of western migration may have induced urban employers to maintain wage rates high enough to discourage workers from leaving.
IX. The Fading Frontier (cont.)

• The real safety valve by the nineteenth century:
  – Was in cities like Chicago, Denver, and San Francisco
  – Where failed farmers, busted miners, and displaced easterners found ways to seek their fortunes
  – After 1880 the area from Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast was the most urbanized region in America.

– The trans-Mississippi West formed a distinct chapter:
  • Native Americans and other groups:
    – Waged their last and most desperate struggle against colonization
    – There most Native Americans live today
    – There “Anglo” culture collided most directly with Hispanic culture—for the dominance in the New World
IX. The Fading Frontier (cont.)

– The Southwest remains the most Hispanicized region in America

– There Americans faced across the Pacific to Asia, and there most Asians American dwell today

– There the severity of the environment:
  » Posed the largest challenges to human abilities
  » There with its aridity and still-managed emptiness, continues to mold social and political life
  » And where the American imagination is unlike anywhere else in the nation

– In no other region has the federal government:
  » With its vast landholdings, its subsidies to the railroads, its massive irrigation projects,
  » Played so conspicuous a role in economic and social development.
IX. The Fading Frontier (cont.)

• Mystical proportions in the American mind:
  – Immortalized by:
    » Writers such as Bret Hare, Mark Twain, Helen Hunt Jackson, Francis Parkman
    » Painters such as: George Catlin, Frederic Remington, Albert Bierstadt
  – For better or worse, the pioneers planted the seeds of American civilization in the immense western wilderness
  – The life we live, they dreamed of; the life they lived, we can only dream.
X. The Farm Becomes a Factory

– Farming changing:
  • Now growing single “cash” crops, such as wheat or corn
    – Used profits to buy foodstuffs at the general store
    – And manufactured goods in town or by mail order
    – The Chicago firm of Aaron Montgomery Ward sent out its first catalogue—a single sheet—in 1872
  • Farmers were becoming consumers and producers
  • Large-scale farmers were now both specialists and businesspeople
    – They were intimately tied to banking, railroading, and manufacturing
    – Had to buy expensive machinery to plant and harvest their crops
X. The Farm Becomes a Factory (cont.)

- A powerful steam engine could drag behind it simultaneously the plow, seeder, and harrow
- Speed of harvesting west was dramatically increased in the 1987s by the “combine”—the combined reaper-thresher
- Widespread use of such equipment naturally called for first-class management.

**Mechanization of agriculture:**

- Drove many farmers of the land
- Miracles of production, making America the world’s breadbasket and butcher shops
- The farm was attaining the status of a factory—an outdoor grain factory
- Bonanza wheat farms of Minnesota-North Dakota were enormous.
X. The Farm Becomes a Factory (cont.)

– These bonanza farms foreshadowed the gigantic agribusiness of the next century

• Agriculture was big business in California:
  – Phenomenally productive Central Valley
  – California’s farms were three times larger than the national average
  – With the advent of the railroad refrigerator car in the 1880s,
    » California fruit and vegetable crops, raised on sprawling tracts by ill-paid migrant Mexican and Chinese farmhands, sold at a handsome profit in the rich urban markets of the East.
XI. Deflation Dooms the Debtor

- Farmers’ financial situations:
  - As long as prices stayed high all went well:
    - The grain framers were no longer the masters of their own destinies:
      - The price of their product was determined in a world market by the world output
    - Low prices and a deflated currency were the chief worries of the frustrated farmers
    - The deflationary pinch on the debtor flowed partly from the static money supply:
      - There simply were not enough dollars to go around, and as a result, prices were forced down.
XI. Deflation Dooms the Debtor (cont.)

– The forgotten farmers were caught on a treadmill:

• They operated year after year at a loss and lived off their fat as best they could
• Their farm machinery increased their output of grain, lowered the price, and drove them deeper into debt
• Mortgages engulfed homesteads at an alarming rate
• Ruinous rates of interest, running from 8 to 40%, were charged on mortgages
• The sons and daughters cried out in despair against the loan sharks and the Wall Street octopus
• Farm tenancy, rather than farm ownership, was spreading.
XII. Unhappy Farmers

– Mother nature, with her powerful forces, conspired against agriculture:
  • Mile-wide clouds of grasshoppers left “nothing but the mortgage.”
  • The terrible cotton-boll weevil wreaked havoc in the South by the early 1890s
  • The good earth was going sour:
    – Floods added to the waste of erosion
    – Expensive fertilizers were urgently needed
    – Long successions of drought seared the land
  • The soil-tillers were gouged by their governments:
    – Local, state and national over-assessed their land, causing them to pay painful local taxes, high protective tariffs.
XII. Unhappy Farmers (cont.)

- Farmers were “farmed” by the corporations and processors
- They were at the mercy of the harvester trust, the barbed-wire trust and the fertilizer trust—all who controlled output and raised prices to extortionate levels
- Middlemen took a juicy “cut”
- The railroad octopus had the grain growers in their grip.

• Farmers still made up ½ of the population in 1890:
  - Hopelessly disorganized
  - Farmers were by nature independent and individualistic—set against consolidation or regimentation
  - They never did organize successfully to restrict production until forced under Roosevelt’s New Deal
  - What they did manage to organize was a monumental political uprising.
XIII. The Farmers Take Their Stand

– Agrarian unrest:

• First flared up with the Greenback movement:
  – Farmers demanded in 1868 a relief from high prices and high indebtedness by calling for an inflation of the currency with paper—unsuccessful.

• The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry—better known as the Grange
  – Was organized in 1876, with the help of Oliver H. Kelley
  – First objective was to enhance the lives of isolated farmers through social, educational, and fraternal activities
  – The Grange’s picnics, concerts, and lectures were a godsend to the isolated farmers
  – It claimed 800,000 members, chiefly in the Midwest and South
XIII. The Farmers Take Their Stand (cont.)

• Grangers raised their goals:
  – From individual self-improvement to improvement of the farmers’ collective plight
  – They established cooperatively owned stores for consumers
  – Cooperatively owned grain elevators and warehouses for producers
  – Attempted to manufacture harvesting machinery.

• Embittered Grangers went into politics:
  – Chiefly in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota
  – There through legislation they strove to:
    » Regulate railway rates and storage fees
    » Some Granger Laws were badly drawn
XIII. The Farmers Take Their Stand (cont.)

– Following judicial reverses, chiefly by the Supreme Court in the famous *Wabash* decision of 1886 (see p. 519), the Grangers’ influence faded.

– But their organization has lived on as a vocal champion of farm interests, while brightening rural life with social activities.

• Farmers’ grievances found a vent in the Greenback Labor party:
  – They combined the inflationary appeal with a program for improving the lot of labor
  – High-water mark of the movement in 1878:
    » Polled over a million votes and elected 14 members of Congress
    » Presidential election 1880, Greenbackers ran James B. Weaver but only polled 3% of the total popular vote.
XIV. Prelude to Populism

– The Farmer’s Alliance:
  • Founded in Texas in late 1870s (see page 505)
  • Saw a striking manifestation of rural discontent
  • Farmers came together to break the strangling grip of the railroads and manufacturers through cooperative buying and selling
  • By 1890 members numbered more than a million
  • The movement weakened itself by ignoring the plight of landless tenant farmers, share-croppers and farmworkers
  • Even more debilitating was the exclusion of blacks, who counted for nearly half the agricultural population of the South.
XIV. Prelude to Populism (cont.)

• In the 1880s a separate Colored Farmers’ National Alliance:
  – Emerged to attract black farmers
  – By 1890 it had a membership of 250,000
  – The long history of racial division in the South made it difficult for white and black farmers to work together.

– **Populists**: the People’s party

• Frustrated farmers attacked Wall Street and the “money trust”:
  – Called for nationalizing the railroads, telephone, and telegraph
  – Instituted a graduated income tax
  – Creating a new federal “sub treasury”
  – Wanted free and unlimited coinage of silver.
XIV. Prelude to Populism (cont.)

• Many fiery prophets for the Populist cause:
  – The free coinage of silver struck many Populists as a cure-all
  – *Coin’s Financial School* (1894) by William Hope Harvey:
    » Brilliant arguments on behalf of free silver
  – Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota, three times elected to Congress:
    – Mary Elizabeth—queen of the Populist “calamity howlers.”

• The Populists were leading a deadly earnest and impassioned campaign to relieve the farmers’ many miseries.
XV. Coxey’s Army and the Pullman Strike

• The Populists saw potential political allies:
  – Coxey’s marchers:
    • Most famous marcher was “General” Jacob S. Coxey:
      – Set out for Washington, D. C. in 1894
      – His platform included a demand that the government relieve unemployment by an inflationary public works program
        » Supported by $500 million in legal tender notes to be issued by the Treasury
      – Coxey and his marches were arrested as they entered Washington.
XV. Coxey’s Army and the Pullman Strike (cont.)

— Violent flare-ups accompanied labor protests, notably in Chicago—the Pullman strike of 1894:

• Eugene V. Debs organized the American Railway Union of 150,000 members:

• The Pullman Palace Car Company, hit hard by the depression, cut wages by about 1/3:
  – The workers finally struck
  – American Federation of Labor declined to support the Pullman strikers
  – Governor John Peter Altgeld of Illinois:
    » A friend of the downtrodden
    » Who had pardoned the Haymarket Square anarchists the year before (see p. 533)
    » Didn’t see the strike as out of hand.
XV. Coxey’s Army and the Pullman Strike (cont.)

– Attorney General Richard Olney:
  » An archconservative and an ex-railroad attorney urged the dispatch of federal troops
  » His legal grounds were that the strikers were interfering with the transit of the U.S. mail
  » President Cleveland supported Olney
  » To the delight of conservatives, federal troops, bayonets fixed, crushed the Pullman strike
  » Debs was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment for contempt of court because he had defied a federal court injunction to cease striking.

– Embittered cries of “government by injunction” now burst from organized labor.
XVI. Golden McKinley and Silver Bryan

– The election of 1896:

• Leading Republican candidate was William McKinley:
  – Sponsor of the ill-starred tariff bill of 1890 (see p. 601)
  – Established a creditable Civil War record
  – Hailed from the potent state of Ohio
  – Could point to long years of honorable service in Congress.

• As a presidential candidate, McKinley was the creature of fellow Ohioan, Marcus Alonzo Hanna:
  – Coveted the role of president maker
  – A wholehearted Hamiltonian, Hanna believed that a prime function of the government was to aid business
  – He became the personification of big industry in politics
  – Believed that in some measure prosperity “trickled down” to the laborer.
XVI. Golden McKinley and Silver Bryan (cont.)

• Republican convention:
  – He organized the preconvention campaign for McKinley with consummate skill and liberal outpouring of his own money
  – McKinley was nominated on first ballot in St. Louis 1896
  – The convention:
    » Declared for the gold standard
    » Condemned hard times and Democratic incapacity
    » Poured praise on the protective tariff

• Democratic camp in dissension:
  – Cleveland no longer led his party:
    » The depression had driven the last nail into his political coffin
    » “The Stuffed Prophet” was the most unpopular man in the country
XVI. Golden McKinley and Silver Bryan (cont.)

• Cleveland remembered by labor-debtor groups:
  – His intervention in the Pullman strike
  – His intervention in the backstairs Morgan bond deal
  – His stubborn hard-money policies.

• Ultraconservative in finance, Cleveland looked more Republican than Democrat on the money issue.

• Democratic convention met in Chicago, July, 1896:
  – The delegates by a suicidal vote of 564 to 357 to endorse their own administration
  – They had the enthusiasm and the numbers; all they lacked was a leader
  – New Moses appeared in the person of William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska, only 36 years old, known as “the Boy Orator of the Platte”
XVI. Golden McKinley and Silver Bryan (cont.)

– He radiated honesty, sincerity, and energy
– He delivered a fervent plea for silver
  » The Cross of Gold speech was a sensation
– He was nominated the next day on the fifth ballot
– Platform demanded inflation through the unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 ounces of silver to 1 of gold
  » The market ration was about 32 to 1
  » Meant that the silver in a dollar would be worth fifty cents.

• The Democratic party members:
  – Some bolted their party over the silver issue
  – Some charged that the Populist-silverites had stolen both the name and the clothes of the party.
XVI. Golden McKinley and Silver Bryan (cont.)

– The Populists now faced a dilemma:
  • The Democratic majority had appropriated their main plank—“16 to 1,” that “heaven-born ratio”
  • Bulk of Populists, fearing a hard-money McKinley victory:
    – Endorsed both “fusion” with the Democrats and Bryan for president
      » Sacrificing their identity in the mix
    – A handful of original Populists refused to support Bryan.
XVII. Class Conflict: Plowholders Versus Bondholders

– Campaign issues:
  • Mark Hanna assumed it would be the tariff
  • Bryan campaigned on behalf of free silver:
    – He created panic among the eastern conservatives
    – The “Gold Bugs” responded with their own free and unlimited coinage of verbiage.
  • Republicans:
    – The McKinleyites amassed the most formidable political campaign chest thus far in American history
      » At all levels—national, state, local—it amounted to about $16 million
      » In contrasted to the $1 million for the Democrats
The Bryanites accused Hanna of buying the election and of floating McKinley into the White House on a tidal wave of mud and money.

- Election returns:
  - McKinley triumphed decisively
  - The vote was 271 to 176 in the Electoral College
  - 7,102,246 to 6,492,559 popular vote
  - Driven by fear and excitement, an unprecedented outpouring of voters flocked to the polls
  - McKinley ran strong in the populous East, carrying every county of New England and in the upper Mississippi Valley
  - Bryan’s states concentrated in the debt-burdened South and the trans-Mississippi West (see Map 26.6).
XVII. Class Conflict: Plowholders Versus Bondholders (cont.)

– The free-silver election of 1896 was perhaps the most significant political turning point since Lincoln’s victories in 1860 and 1864:
  
  • Despite Bryan’s strength in the South and West:
    – The results vividly demonstrated his lack of appeal to the unmortgaged farmer and to the eastern urban laborer
    – Many wage earners in the East voted for their jobs and full dinner pails—
      » threatened by free silver, free trade, fireless factories.
      » Living on a fixed wage, the factory workers had no reason to favor inflation, which was the heart of the Bryanites’s program.
XVI. Class Conflict: Plowholders Versus Bondholders (cont.)

– The Bryan-McKinley battle heralded the advent of a new era in American politics:
  • The underprivileged many against the privileged few,
  • Of the indebted backcountry against the city,
  • Of the agrarians against the industrialists,
  • Of Main Street against Wall Street,
  • Of the nobodies against the somebodies.

– The outcome was a resounding victory for big business, the big cities, middle-class values, and financial conservatism.
XVII. Class Conflict: Plowholders Versus Bondholders (cont.)

– The Grand Old Party’s smashing victory of 1896:
  • Heralded a Republican grip on the White House for 16 consecutive years
  • McKinley’s election imparted a new character to the American political system:
    – Diminishing voter participation in elections
    – Weakening of party organizations
    – Fading away of issues like the money question and civil-service reform which came to be replaced by concern for industrial regulation and the welfare of labor
    – The new political era of the fourth party system characterized by remarkably high voter turnouts and close contests between Democrats and Republicans.
Eminently “safe” McKinley took the inaugural oath in 1897:

- His cautious, conservative nature caused him to shy away from reform
  - Business was given a free rein
  - Trusts were allowed to develop without serious restraints
- The tariff issue quickly forced itself to the forefront:
  - Wilson-Gorman law was not raising enough revenue to cover the annual Treasury deficits
  - Republican trusts thought they had the right to additional tariff protection:
    » Because of their contributions to Hanna’s war chest.
The Dingley Tariff Bill was jammed through the House in 1897 under “Czar” Reed

- The proposed rates were high, but not enough to satisfy the paunchy lobbyists—who descended upon the Senate
- Over 850 amendments were tacked onto the overburdened bill
- Resulting piece of patchwork finally established the average rates at 46.5%:
  » Substantially higher than the Democratic Wilson-Gorman Act of 1894
  » In some categories even higher than the McKinley Act of 1890 (See the chart in the Appendix).
Prosperity began to return with a rush in 1897, the first year of McKinley’s term:

- Depression (1893) had run its course, farm prices rose
- Wheels of industry resumed their hum
- Republican politicians claimed credit for attracting the sunlight of prosperity
- The **Gold Standard Act** 1900, passed over last-ditch silverite opposition:
  - Provided the paper currency be redeemed freely in gold
  - Gold discoveries brought huge quantities of gold onto the world markets
  - As did the perfecting of the cheap cyanide process for extracting gold from low-grade ore.
XVIII. Republican Stand-pattism

Enthroned (cont.)

• Moderate inflation took care of the currency needs of an explosively expanding nation:
  – As its circulatory system greatly improved.
• The tide of “silver heresy” rapidly receded
• The “Popocratic” fish were left gasping high and dry on a golden-sanded beach.
Honest payment of honest debts.

Political Object Lessons

A vote for Bryan means a vote for free trade.

A vote for McKinley means sound government, sound money, and prosperity.

The integrity of the Supreme Court must be sustained.

Gold is the universal standard of the world.

Patent applied for.

By Gallison & Hobron Co., New York.
HONEST PAYMENT OF HONEST DEBTS.

POLITICAL OBJECT LESSONS

A VOTE FOR MCKINLEY MEANS SOUND GOVERNMENT, SOUND MONEY AND PROSPERITY.

A VOTE FOR BRYAN MEANS A VOTE FOR FREE TRADE.

A VOTE FOR MCKINLEY MEANS PROTECTION AMERICAN INDUSTRIES.

A VOTE FOR BRYAN MEANS REFORMATION AND DISHONOR.

THE INTEGRITY OF THE SUPREME COURT MUST BE SUSTAINED.

GOLD IS THE UNIVERSAL STANDARD OF THE WORLD.

PATENT APPLIED FOR

BY GALLISON & HOBSON CO., NEW YORK.
**CHRONOLOGY**

**ca. 1700–1800** New Indian peoples move onto Great Plains

**1858** Pikes Peak gold rush

**1859** Nevada Comstock Lode discovered

**1862** Homestead Act

**1864** Sand Creek massacre
Nevada admitted to Union

**1867** National Grange organized

**1876** Battle of the Little Bighorn
Colorado admitted to Union

**1877** Nez Perce war

**1881** Helen Hunt Jackson publishes *A Century of Dishonor*

**1884** Federal government outlaws Indian Sun Dance

**1885** Canadian Pacific Railway, first transcontinental rail line, completed across Canada

**1885–1890** Local chapters of Farmers’ Alliance formed

**1887** Dawes Severalty Act

**1889** Oklahoma opened to U.S. citizen settlement

**1889–1890** North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho, and Wyoming admitted to Union

**1890** Census Bureau declares frontier line ended
Emergence of People's party (Populists)

**1891** Battle of Wounded Knee
Construction of Trans-Siberian Railroad begins

**1892** Populist party candidate James B. Weaver polls more than 1 million votes in presidential election

**1893** Frederick Jackson Turner publishes “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”

**1894** “Coxey’s Army” marches on Washington
Pullman strike

**1896** Utah admitted to Union
McKinley defeats Bryan for presidency

**1897** Dingley Tariff Act

**1900** Gold Standard Act

**1907** Oklahoma admitted to Union

**1924** Indians granted U.S. citizenship

**1934** Indian Reorganization Act