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The American West

History, Myth, and Legacy

Course Guidebook

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Patrick N. Allitt was born in 1956 and raised in Mickleover, England. He attended John Port School in the Derbyshire village of Etwall and was an undergraduate at Hertford College, University of Oxford, from 1974 to 1977. He studied American History at the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1986. Between 1985 and 1988, he was a Henry Luce Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard Divinity School, where he specialized in American Religious History. Since then, he has been

on the history faculty of Emory University, except for one year (1992–1993) as a fellow at the Princeton University Center for the Study of Religion. He was the director of Emory's Center for Teaching and Curriculum from 2004 to 2009 and has been the Cahoon Family Professor of American History since 2009.

Professor Allitt is the author of five scholarly books: *A Climate of Crisis: America in the Age of Environmentalism*; *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities throughout American History*; *Religion in America Since 1945: A History*; *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome*; and *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985*. In addition, he is the editor of *Major Problems in American Religious History* and author of a memoir about his life as a college professor, *I'm the Teacher, You're the Student: A Semester in the University Classroom*. He has written numerous articles and reviews for academic and popular journals, including book reviews in *The Spectator* and *The Weekly Standard*.

Professor Allitt has made eight other Great Courses: *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*; *The Conservative Tradition*; *American Religious History*; *Victorian Britain*; *The History of the United States, 2nd Edition* (with Professors Allen C. Guelzo and Gary W. Gallagher); *The American Identity*; *The Art of Teaching: Best Practices from a Master Educator*; and *The Industrial Revolution*.

Professor Allitt's wife, Toni, is a Michigan native. They have one daughter, Frances. ■

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

THE AMERICAN WEST: HISTORY, MYTH, AND LEGACY

The conquest and settlement of the American West transformed the United States from a regional republic into a continental power. An area that Thomas Jefferson believed would take 1,000 years or more to settle was overrun within a century. Believed by European colonial powers to be the least enticing area of the Americas, the West instead became the heartland of the richest and most powerful nation in the history of the world.

The idea of the West exercised a great fascination over generations of Americans, and remains a central part of American folklore and self-understanding. West is, of course, primarily a relational term—a compass bearing. For a region to be considered "the West," there must be something considered "the East," a home base against which the West reacts and from which the West seeks aid and approval. To the revolutionary generation of the 1770s, "the West" meant the lands beyond the Appalachians, which they were already beginning to seize from the Native Americans. Thirty years later, in the time of Lewis and Clark, it meant the lands west of St. Louis. To wagon trains on the Oregon Trail in the 1840s, it meant the lands adjacent to the Pacific Ocean.

The West represented to its migrants a place where they might find land to farm, minerals to mine, or freedom from religious persecution. Utah, which was settled by Mormons in the 1840s, provided the most dramatic example of a religious group seeking a religious haven in the West. Mormon leader

Brigham Young underestimated the rate at which the frontier would catch up, but was nonetheless able to establish a theocratic republic whose influence can still be felt today.

Frederick Jackson Turner, one of the most influential historians of the American West, argued that the distinctive elements of the American character came from the encounter of settlers with the frontier. Domesticating the frontier, Turner wrote in an 1893 essay, forced Americans to live by their wits, to cooperate, to revert temporarily to earlier stages of civilization, and to embody a more wholehearted democracy than anything on offer in the Old World.

Turner drew a veil over the degree to which the settlement of the American West was accompanied by force. Texas, for example, was won from Mexico by a war of independence in the 1830s. Another war against Mexico brought the United States the area now comprising California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado—the entirety of the present-day Southwest. Smaller, local wars were fought throughout the century to dispossess the Native Americans. Their few victories, including the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876, could not reverse the trend; they were hopelessly outmatched by the technology, organization, and sheer numbers of the encroaching Americans.

Western history is a story of climatic extremes, of great hardships overcome, of suffering at the hands of others, and of fortunes won and lost. It is also testament to the brilliance of American technology and entrepreneurialism, hand in hand with support from the federal government. Without railroads, settlement would have crept forward instead of jumping. Without irrigation, agriculture would have been impossible in the Southwest. Without the Homestead Act, steel plows, and horse-drawn harvesters, the Great Plains would never have been farmed.

The 24 lectures of this course explore the processes of Western history and show how they became the stuff of myths, legends, movies, political speeches, and continuing claims about the exceptional character of the United States. ■

Lecture 1

WESTWARD THE COURSE OF EMPIRE

The early American West has long been portrayed as a place of wild extremes, where life was hard and justice was rough and ready. And there is some truth to that picture. There is also, however, an immense mythology about the West and its history. This lecture begins the process of separating fact from fiction, examining how the exploration, settlement, and development of the American West affected contemporaneous understandings of national identity.

MANIFEST DESTINY

- When the United States secured its independence, its western boundary was the Mississippi River, but nearly all of its citizens lived east of the Appalachians. In search of better farmland, a tide of settlers crossed the mountains and settled in the valleys whose waters flow into the Ohio, the Tennessee, and the Cumberland Rivers, ultimately reaching the sea at the mouth of the Mississippi.

- Not all of these settlers had proper title to the lands they settled. At that point, it wasn't even certain whether the Americans would be able to make good their claim to this area—French and British challenges persisted and were a source of political tension in the last years of the 18th century.

- When President Jefferson bought the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon's government in 1803, he doubled the land area of the United States at a stroke. His main interest was securing the mouth of the Mississippi River, but in the long run this bold action would have immense implications for the development of the republic.

- Jefferson sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the purchase. They discovered a vast area of fertile plains, thinly populated by nomadic tribes and crisscrossed by great buffalo herds. Beyond that lay a great mountain range—the Rockies—and harsh deserts. There were also fertile valleys, however, and one great river—the Columbia—that roared down to the Pacific.

- At first, the great lands Lewis and Clark had crossed seemed useful mainly as a source of furs. Mountain men like Kit Carson and William Sublette risked their lives to explore the tributaries of the Missouri River and to seek out the beaver, whose pelts were so valuable on the European market.

- By the 1830s, countless Americans were beginning to think that sooner or later the United States would occupy the whole of North America, even if it meant pushing aside whoever else lived there. "Manifest Destiny" was the idea that God Himself wanted them to occupy it, and had ordained it—a handy notion that gave a kind of divine sanction to their sometimes unscrupulous expansion.

- Ambitious and ruthless soldiers, settlers, and entrepreneurs turned the idea of Manifest Destiny into a reality; they went to war against Mexico when it tried to stand in their way, almost went to war against Britain when it contested their claim to the Oregon Country, and fought savage little wars against whatever Native Americans tried to hinder them. They did it all with a high sense of self-righteousness that their antagonists could not possibly have thought justified.

- In the 1840s, farmers from the Midwest, plagued by malaria and on the lookout for better opportunities, began the great trek to the Willamette Valley of Oregon, moving along what soon came to be called the Oregon Trail in journeys that lasted from five to eight months. In 1849, the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, California, swelled numbers on the first half of this trail, until they branched off southward, making their way to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada where the goldfields lay.

- Subsequent discoveries of gold and silver, like the Comstock Lode of Nevada or the find that sparked the Denver gold rush of 1859, prompted mining settlements to pop up almost overnight, as actual or prospective miners swarmed in to get rich. Much of the interior of the West was first peopled by these mining rushes; prospectors came first, while farmers followed only later, when the first euphoria had subsided.

- Hanging over the republic through these decades of the 1840s and 1850s was the unresolved question of whether slavery would play a permanent role in American life. White Southerners said yes. Many white Northerners said no, while an abolitionist movement complicated the issue by insisting that this was not just a pragmatic question but one of overwhelming moral significance.

- As the population moved west and more states came into being, each had to confront the question of whether it would accept or reject slavery as part of its economy. The balance of power in the United States Senate between free and slave states became increasingly unworkable. Disagreements among settlers in Kansas and Nebraska led to guerrilla fighting in the 1850s, in part of the prelude to the Civil War.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

- Although the Oregon and the California Trails led across the Great Plains, it initially seemed unlikely that many Americans would settle on the plains themselves. The completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, however, began to shine a new light on the possibility of settling the plains.

- Connected by rail to cities back East, the Great Plains could now be turned into farms—that is, once the buffalo herds had been exterminated, and once the Indians living there had been defeated and forced onto reservations. These ecological and humanitarian tragedies were justified in the language of Manifest Destiny and the

idea that the Americans were benignly spreading civilization while stamping out savagery.

- Between 1865 and 1885, the Great Plains turned into an immense farming belt. The region's productivity was so great that it reduced the cost of food to consumers throughout the Western world. Tens of thousands of homesteaders—some from back East, others all the way from Europe—came to stake their claims. Not all of them succeeded, however, and much of the land was subsequently consolidated into larger farms.

- The plains were also great cattle land. One of the common themes in Western movies is the conflict between cowboys and farmers over whether the land should remain as open range or whether it should be fenced, plowed, and farmed. The farming frontier gradually moved

west through the 1860s and 1870s, edging out the herders, who were left the high, dry plains of Wyoming and Montana.

- Cattle raising has remained one of the area's major activities right up to the present, quite apart from its role in shaping the image of the American West. The cowboy had to be extraordinarily patient, careful, and methodical, but also resourceful and self-reliant. No figure has come to symbolize American independence more than he.

- In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, lumbering became a major Western industry, especially in the Pacific Northwest. The damming of Western rivers and the building of irrigation works followed. Land that for centuries had seemed almost worthless because of aridity was transformed into highly productive irrigated farmland.

- In the 20th century, the American West remained an area devoted in large part to the production of raw materials—chiefly foodstuffs, oil, and mineral ores. It also became, especially in California, a major industrial region in its own right. By the 1950s, California alone had an economy bigger than that of most nations throughout the world.

- The other great development of the 20th century was the rise of tourism. It began as soon as the first transcontinental railway was finished. Trains would stop between tunnels high in the Sierra Nevada so that passengers could climb out and admire the view. The railroad companies encouraged the idea that the Rocky Mountains and the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona were places to vacation, rather than just obstacles to be overcome.

AMERICAN IDENTITY

- There are many ways to view the remarkable developments that took place in the American West—and this is where the question of mythology comes into play. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, the story of American expansion across the continent was

usually told in the heroic mode, using phrases such as "taming the Wild West," "cultivating the virgin land," and "closing the frontier."

- Historians in the mid- to late 20th century pointed out that the West had not been virgin land, in the sense of being hitherto untouched. Instead, they said, Americans seized the area from people who had already been living there for hundreds or thousands of years. They were conquerors, empire builders, doing in the American West what the British Empire was doing at the same time in Africa, Australia, and India, and what the Russians were doing in Siberia.

- Ironically, according to the latter view, a nation that had fought to get away from its colonial overlord was now subjecting other peoples to the same kind of imperialism it had so violently rejected. Looked at in this way, Western pioneers might be regarded not as heroes but as predators or invaders. These historians have helped us recognize that there is much in Western history of which we should feel ashamed.

- Different ways of thinking about the West have also affected the interpretation of American history as a whole. Historians ask whether the experience of the United States is essentially similar to, or essentially different from, the experience of other parts of Western civilization. The idea that it's different is called American exceptionalism, and one of the best-known theories of exceptionalism is linked directly to the development of the American West.

- Historian Frederick Jackson Turner, speaking at a conference in Chicago in 1893, reasoned that the American people's distinctive character was produced by the encounter with the frontier. Frontiersmen learned to adapt, to cooperate with one another, and to treat each other as equals. They subdued the wild lands around them, working out ideas and techniques unknown to their ancestors.

- A few years before Turner's speech, the U.S. Census Bureau had announced that there was no longer a recognizable frontier line of settlement in the American West. Turner feared that America was

facing an identity crisis, because until then, the taming of the frontier had been its distinctive mission. Would America begin to decline, Turner wondered, now that its mighty tussle with the frontier was at an end?

- Another man who feared that possibility was future president Theodore Roosevelt, then a young politician. Roosevelt was anxious to keep alive the frontier virtues of self-reliance, fearless independence, and willingness to fight. Otherwise, he believed, America would become flabby and weak, and would follow the world's other empires into decrepitude and senility.

- The idea of the frontier as the maker of a distinctive American character had an immense influence on American life in the 20th century. Consider President Kennedy's name for his administration—the New Frontier—and the everyday use of the word "frontier" to describe any challenge or novelty.

SUGGESTED READING

Cather, *My Antonia*.

Lavender, *The Great West*.

Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*.

Webb, *The Great Plains*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why is the concept of "The West" ambiguous? Is it nevertheless useful for the study of American history?
2. How does fiction, which is not literally true, sometimes teach us important truths about history?

Lecture 2

THE WEST IN THE COLONIAL ERA

This lecture examines the history of the American West during the colonial era of the 17th and 18th centuries. To provide you with a broad foundation for further study, the lecture will address both the region known today as the West, and the West as perceived by the first English colonists—i.e., all the land west of their original settlements.

THE SPANISH

- The way the U.S. looks today is the result of countless separate events, and a series of conflicts among rival groups vying for dominance. Chief among these groups were the British, French, Spanish, and Native Americans. All these groups left their mark on the history of the West. To understand that history, we need to understand their points of view—how they saw the place that we call the West today.

- Let's start with the Spaniards. After the success of Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro in conquering Mexico and Peru, and seizing their astonishing treasures of gold and silver, later conquistadores hoped to find more of the same on the mainland to the north of Hispaniola, where Columbus had first landed.

- Hernando de Soto set out in 1539 with 620 men and about 230 horses. They landed on the west coast of Florida, made their way northward into what is now Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, then struck west through present-day Alabama and Mississippi. A brutal, rapacious, and belligerent group, they often fought against the Indians they met, attempting to enslave them, and demanding whatever of value they could acquire.


Hernando de Soto
(c. 1496/97–1542)

- De Soto's band was tormented by mosquitoes, swampland, and fever, while suffering extremes of summer heat and winter cold. De Soto's group was also probably the first Europeans to see the Mississippi River. They reached it in 1541, and

it held them up for a month as they built boats to ferry themselves across.

- De Soto himself died from fever in what is now Arkansas or Louisiana in 1542. He had told the local Indians that he was the sun god, immune to death, hoping in this way to impress and intimidate them. His men covertly committed his body to the river rather than give him a public funeral, which would have forced them to admit that he had been, in fact, all too human. The survivors then sailed down the river, under attack from furious natives on both banks.

- De Soto's expedition cost nearly half the men their lives, and the survivors did not return laden with treasure. Although in the long run the United States was destined to become the wealthiest part of the Americas, the Spaniards turned away from this area, disappointed not to have found advanced political societies brimming with treasure and ripe for plunder. They left behind epidemic diseases, a reputation for ruthlessness, and a legacy of ill will that would fester for generations.

- At about the same time, Francisco de Coronado, another conquistador, was searching, much farther west, for the legendary Seven Cities of Gold. An unreliable informant had told him that they rivaled the Aztec capital for wealth and magnificence. His expedition trudged across the burning desert that now marks the boundary between Arizona and Mexico, then into the Staked Plains of Texas and parts of present-day Kansas. Like de Soto's group, Coronado's men warred against the local Indians, showed extraordinary brutality in destroying pueblo villages, and came away empty-handed and discredited.

- The next generation of Spanish rulers in the Southwest were equally violent and odious. One of them, Juan de Oñate, demanded the winter food supplies of the people of the Acoma pueblo. They resisted, and killed 11 Spaniards in a skirmish in 1598. Oñate retaliated with a massive counterattack, in which he killed about 800, mutilated

each surviving man by cutting off one of his feet, and took the whole population into slavery.

- Spanish settlement of the river valleys of the Southwest, particularly the Rio Grande, was accompanied by the building of mission churches and an effort to turn the local Zuni, Apache, Navaho, and Pueblo peoples into Christians. Only much later, in the mid-1700s, did the Spaniards begin to Christianize California. Even the Spaniards who came to convert rather than to plunder could often bring catastrophe, because they were bearers of diseases to which the Indians had no resistance.

- Also very important to the future of the continent was the Spaniards' introduction of cattle and horses. It was troublesome for the Spaniards to get their horses to the New World, but those horses that made it to the Americas were their best weapon. They had already proved to be a source of terror to the Aztecs and Incas who faced them in battle. Cortés himself declared, "After God, we owed our victory to the horses."

- Very early on, horses began to escape, so the horse frontier spread across the West much earlier than the line of settlement. In the 1600s and 1700s, Plains Indians began to domesticate these strange new animals and learn how to ride them. This meant they could travel greater distances, hunt buffalo on horseback, enjoy a diet richer in meat, and more easily go to war against each other. Anthropologists now recognize that the arrival of horses was transforming the way of life of Plains Indians a century and more before they encountered white men.

- The same was true of cattle. The lack of fences in the New World meant that Andalusian cattle, brought from Spain in voyages after Columbus's first, soon began to stray, turning wild and spreading in great numbers across Texas and the southern plains. They too would eventually have a profound effect on the history of the area, creating the raw materials around which the mythology of the Texas cowboys would grow up in the 19th century.

THE FRENCH

- Frenchmen as well as Spaniards came to the American West. Despite numerous earlier ventures and temporary colonies, they established permanent settlements in the valley of the St. Lawrence River only around 1600.

- French explorers of the 1600s had read the Spanish chronicles. They realized that they were not going to find cities paved with gold, or civilizations like the Aztecs and the Incas. On the other hand, they discovered that the Indians they met were willing to trade.

- The Indians traded furs, particularly beaver pelts, then greatly coveted in Europe, in exchange for beads, blankets, axes, alcohol, and, above all, guns and ammunition. For more than two centuries, a complex trade system developed between French voyageurs, merchants in Quebec and Montreal, and a variety of Indian peoples,

who gradually overhunted the beaver in nearby river systems before moving farther into the interior in search of more.

- Among the French adventurers were a group of highly educated Jesuit priests intent on converting the natives to Christianity. Their letters back to their superiors in France provide historians with marvelous insight into the Indians' way of life and its hardships.

- The French, with Indian guides and interpreters, explored America's water routes bit by bit over the course of the 1600s. In 1673, Louis Jolliet, who had been born in Quebec, and Father Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit priest from France, paddled their canoes up the Fox River from Green Bay, in what is now Wisconsin, then put their canoes into the Wisconsin River, which flows west into the Mississippi. They hoped and believed that this big river would lead westward, all the way to the Pacific.

- Jolliet and Marquette were disappointed to find that the big river flowed not west but south, and they realized that if they followed it all the way it would bring them into the Gulf of Mexico. They mapped it, but stopped at the mouth of the Arkansas River when they found Indians wearing Spanish trinkets. They were afraid of encountering hostile Spanish forces. They returned home by a slightly shorter route, paddling up the Illinois River and then down the Chicago River, reaching Lake Michigan at the site of present-day Chicago.

- Five years later, a prosperous fur trader from Montreal, René Cavelier, sieur de La Salle, set out to explore the whole length of the Mississippi. He made it to the Gulf of Mexico in 1682. It was he who named the whole area Louisiana, in honor of the king of France, Louis XIV. Just as the French were the first to explore the Mississippi from end to end, so also they explored the biggest river that flowed into it from the east, the Ohio and its tributaries.

THE ENGLISH

- English settlement began more than 100 years after Columbus—not for lack of interest, but for lack of power to take on the Spanish. That situation changed after the destruction of the Spanish Armada in 1588, a decisive English sea victory, which began the long decline of Spain as an Atlantic power and the gradual ascendancy of Britain.

- The first permanent English settlement on the American coast was established in 1607, at Jamestown, Virginia. Throughout most of the colonial era, English settlements stayed close to the Atlantic shore. By the time of the American Revolution, after nearly 170 years of settlement, nearly all the English-speaking colonists still lived within 100 miles of the ocean. Only the hardiest minority had ventured beyond the Appalachians.

- There were several reasons why English settlers stayed close to the Atlantic. For colonists in Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia, it was because they were involved in growing export crops, chiefly tobacco, indigo, rice, and cotton. They needed to be close to ports, or

at least to the navigable rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay. The Atlantic was their lifeline, and they still thought of themselves as English.

- For colonists in New England, the West was frightening. William Bradford, in 1620, called New England a "howling wilderness," and that was the common view among early Puritan writers. It really was dangerous—home to wolves, and to men who killed and tortured their captives. Fear of the Indians was an especially strong deterrent.

- Another reason for the lack of westward migration came from some English settlers' reluctance to fight. The Quaker founders of Pennsylvania, starting with William Penn, wanted peace, not the friction that an expanding frontier would create.

- The geographical situation of the early British colonies also limited westward migration. Routes through the Appalachians in the days before roads and railways were few and far between. For those who did cross the mountains, it was a laborious and difficult journey, and remote from help and from friends.

- Imperial policy further impeded dynamic westward expansion; the British government didn't want colonists moving over the mountains and thus beyond their administrative reach, where they were likely to cause conflicts with the Indians when they arrived.

- An adventurous minority of English settlers did go west. The high birth rate in New England, and the high childhood survival rate, meant that population was growing rapidly. This put pressure on available farmland, and tempted young men who wanted farms of their own to seek their fortunes by heading west, despite all the dangers.

- Virginians also began to move west because they needed new land for tobacco farming. Tobacco had been the salvation of the Virginia colony in its early years, when it was right on the brink of failure and starvation. It was so profitable that almost the entire colony, and

neighboring Maryland, began planting tobacco on every available acre of land.

- Very few Englishmen wanted to work for other whites when, by moving a few miles to the west, they could cultivate farms of their own. Plantation owners experimented with indentured servitude, importing paupers and prisoners from England to work as temporary slaves. After 1650, however, they turned increasingly to imported African slaves, a permanent captive labor force.

SUGGESTED READING

Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive*.

Hine and Faragher, *The American West*.

Parkman, *LaSalle and the Discovery of the Great West*.

Siepel, *Conquistador Voices*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why did the Spanish and French both decline to explore the area that became the thirteen colonies?
2. Should we be surprised that there was so little westward expansion in the British colonial era?

Lecture 3

VENTURING BEYOND THE APPALACHIANS

The 1763 Treaty of Paris brought an end to the French and Indian War. With the French threat to England's American colonies eliminated, the Anglo-American colonists soon grew weary of the onerous rules and regulations imposed by the British. This was the prelude to the escalating series of events that led to the Revolutionary War.

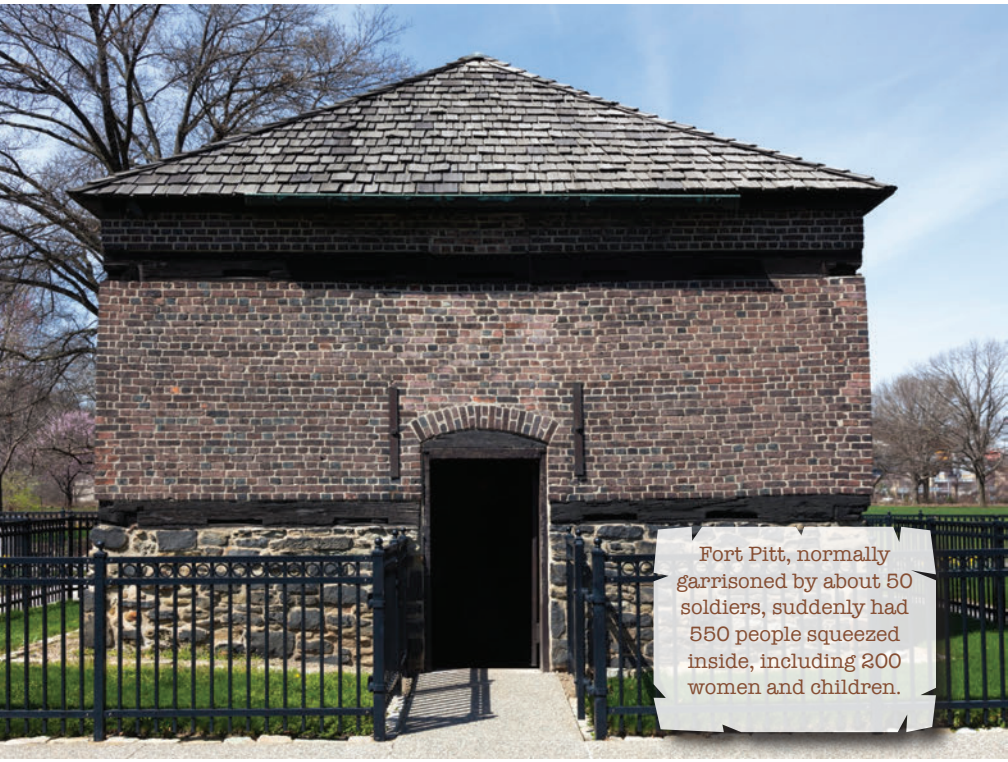
FRONTIER CONFLICTS

- Among the American colonists' grievances was a ban on migration to the West. In order to cut down on friction between colonists and Indians after the war, Britain imposed the Proclamation Line, a 1763 restriction on settlement west of the Appalachians. Settlers moved there anyway, however; their sheer numbers made it impossible for the few British garrison forces in the West to stop them.

- British authorities' fear of friction was genuine. The French government had given the area's Indian nations lavish gifts each year in return for their cooperation. These gifts, particularly of guns and ammunition, had helped the Indians to hunt fur-bearing animals, which was the chief trade item. General Amherst, the British governor-general, tried to cut back on these gifts, fearing that he was arming potential enemies. The Indians responded with an uprising, one that historians came to call Pontiac's Rebellion, after the Ottawa chief who was one of its leaders.

- Groups of Delaware, Shawnee, Ottawa, Ojibwa, Seneca, and Huron Indians attacked the main British forts in the Great Lakes area, captured the smaller ones, and besieged the larger ones. They killed all the English-speaking settlers they could find. A stampede of frightened settlers came pouring into the forts. Fort Pitt, normally garrisoned by about 50 soldiers, suddenly had 550 people squeezed inside, including 200 women and children.

- In the horribly overcrowded fort, a smallpox epidemic broke out. General Amherst, aware that the illness might be used advantageously against the enemy, wrote to the commander of a relief expedition: "Could it not be contrived to send the smallpox among the disaffected tribes of Indians? We must on this occasion use every stratagem in our power to reduce them." The officer agreed. During truce discussions, contaminated blankets and handkerchiefs were given to the Indian negotiators, who unwittingly took the infection back to their own camps.



- Thousands of Indians died from smallpox that year and the next. Having never previously experienced it, the Indians had developed no biological resistance. Amherst's attempt to use this form of biological warfare is sometimes cited as an example of the Anglo-Americans attempting genocide against the Native Americans. Amherst certainly did hate and fear the Indians. In another letter, he wrote to a fellow officer that he would try "every other method that can serve to extirpate this execrable race," including "hunting them down with dogs."

- The arrival of stronger British forces after a series of bloody battles led to the negotiation of peace treaties. Nevertheless, Pontiac's Rebellion

left a legacy of bitterness along the frontier. Indian raiders in Virginia and Pennsylvania had scalped women and children. Some prisoners had been tortured to death or burned at the stake.

- One group of enraged Pennsylvania settlers, the Paxton Boys, retaliated by attacking a peaceful Indian settlement that was not involved in the war and massacring many of its inhabitants. When the local authorities took the rest of the villagers into protective custody to save their lives, the Paxton Boys broke into the prison and completed the massacre.

- The treaties that ended the French and Indian War specified that all captives had to be returned. Many of the Indian nations had a tradition of adopting young captive children. For the children, the sudden and sometimes unwelcome return to a culture they no longer remembered or identified with could be traumatic.

EARLY SETTLEMENTS

- In the trans-Appalachian West of the 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s, a power struggle was taking place among four groups: French, Indians, Spanish, and British—not to mention the British colonists, who became a group in their own right after the American Revolution. French power in the Great Lakes area was in decline, but the French were still influential in New Orleans and the lower Mississippi valley. No other contenders were able to assert their will, which made the area vulnerable to chronic, low-level warfare.

- In the long run, of course, it was the Americans who would emerge as winners. It could not have been obvious at the time. One reason for the Americans' ultimate success was the sheer numbers in which they came. Even before the American Revolution had begun, groups of settlers were moving into the area and setting up ad hoc governments.

- One such group was the Watauga Association. A group of settlers in what is now eastern Tennessee, they set up a provisional government

in 1772, in violation of the Proclamation Line. They drafted the Articles of the Watauga Association, specifying the establishment of courts, jails, and a militia company, and spelling out their principles of self-government. Some historians, including Theodore Roosevelt, romanticized them as "the first men of American birth to establish a free and independent community on the continent."

- Another such group was the Transylvania Company. Their chief was Richard Henderson, and their most famous employee was Daniel Boone. Henderson made a deal with some Cherokee in 1775 to buy 20 million acres of land in what is now Kentucky. They founded the town of Boonesborough, and Boone himself helped build an emigrant trail through the Cumberland Gap—the Wilderness Road, it was called. The settlers then held a three-day constitutional convention under a great elm tree, creating a government for the colony.

- Boone and the Transylvania Company were good at public relations, and a book about their exploits, *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucky*, helped create the legend of Boone as the perfect frontiersman. They saw themselves as missionaries, displacing

wicked men and creating a new civilization. As the historian Elliott West writes, Boone was one of the first westerners to suffer "the fate of many to come, transmogrified from flesh and bone into mythic creatures." Boone's reputation survived for the next two centuries.

- The practical details of these settlements were messy. It wasn't clear that the Cherokee, who had leased land to the Wataugans and sold it to the Transylvanians, owned the land in the first place. Many Native American groups hunted in Kentucky, but it was not home to any of them. The land was also claimed by Virginia, which rejected the Transylvanians' right to establish an independent government.

- During the American Revolution, many Indian nations allied with the British. They feared the continuing incursion of settlers from across the mountains. It makes for depressing reading—endless raids and counter-raids, atrocities committed on both sides, chronic uncertainty and instability, and occasional larger forces trying to make a permanent difference.

ORGANIZATION EFFORTS

- When the war ended in 1783, sovereignty over the whole of the trans-Appalachian West was handed to the new American republic. The reality remained more ambiguous; many British soldiers and traders were still there, the Spanish and French had interests there, and Americans still lacked easy access to the mouth of the Mississippi River, the key to trading west of the mountains.

- The American government established by the Articles of Confederation was desperately short of money, burdened with debts, and able to pay its soldiers only in depreciated continental currency. It persuaded the newly independent states to surrender the lands they claimed in the West, between the Appalachians and the Mississippi, so that they could be surveyed and sold to settlers. Some soldiers from the Continental Army were paid in western lands.

- The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 created a set of rules and brought into existence the first federal territory, which eventually became Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota. Under the ordinance, land acquired by the federal government would first be governed as a territory. A territory could then petition for statehood once its population reached 60,000. Once admitted, it would have the same rights and representation as all other states. It was decided that slavery would be excluded from the newly established Northwest Territory.

- Accompanying the Northwest Ordinance was the 1785 Land Ordinance, which specified that the whole area would be surveyed, starting at the point where the Ohio River flowed west out of Pennsylvania. The land was to be divided into square townships of 640 acres. The land would then go on sale at a price of at least one dollar per acre, enabling orderly communities to assemble one after the next as the line of settlement moved westward.

- The legislation declared that the Indians were not going to be forcibly dispossessed by this process of settlement. The unspoken assumption seems to have been that the Indians who actually lived on these lands would somehow obligingly cooperate with settlement, even though it would doom their traditional way of life.

- Three messy realities interfered with the smooth operation of the system. The first was that large numbers of squatters had arrived before the survey, and would fight against dispossession. The second was that large property companies bribed congressmen and state assemblymen to give them immense land grants, which they then tried to sell at a profit to potential settlers. The third problem was that Indians fought to prevent settlement from happening, once the scope of the undertaking became clear.

SUGGESTED READING

Dowd, *War under Heaven*.

Eckert, *That Dark and Bloody River*.

Faragher, *Daniel Boone*.

White, *The Middle Ground*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How were the Native Americans west of the Appalachians able to resist British and American incursions for so long, and why did they eventually fail?
2. Why were so many settlers willing to accept the risks involved in founding Transylvania, Franklin, and other pioneering trans-Appalachian settlements? Do you find their attitudes easy or difficult to grasp?

Lecture 4

DISCOVERIES OF LEWIS AND CLARK

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 vastly expanded the territory of the United States at the stroke of a pen. At the time it was signed, however, just what the new lands contained was still a mystery. In this lecture, you will learn about Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and their exploration of the Louisiana Purchase between 1804 and 1806.

THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE

- New Orleans, the port near the mouth of the Mississippi River, was founded by a French company in 1718. The city controlled trade into and out of the great river, and it grew in commercial importance as settlement west of the Appalachians increased after the American Revolution.

- Control of the mouth of the Mississippi River was strategically essential. France ceded it reluctantly to Spain in 1762, as part of the complex diplomatic maneuvers that accompanied the end of the French and Indian War. France reacquired it secretly in 1800, as Napoleon hoped to revive France's imperial presence in the New World.

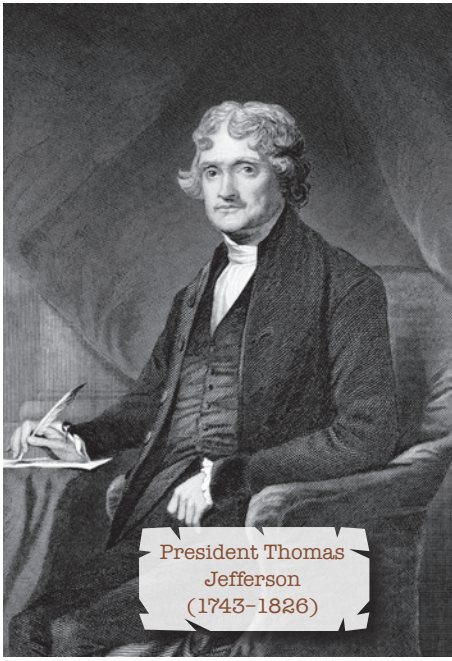
- The city of New Orleans and the lower reaches of the river were all that mattered to most Americans. They simply wanted to be sure that they could trade through the port—a right they were sometimes granted and sometimes denied.

- Before Napoleon could reassert French power on the mainland, he had to suppress a slave uprising in Haiti. The army he sent to the Caribbean suffered catastrophic losses: two-thirds of the soldiers died, and the 7,000 who survived were forced to withdraw. Haiti declared itself an independent republic. With pressure growing from his enemies in Europe, Napoleon decided to cut his losses in the Americas.

- President Jefferson authorized his emissaries, James Monroe and Robert Livingstone, to purchase not just the city of New Orleans, but the entire area between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains. Monroe and Livingstone completed the purchase in 1803, at a cost of $15 million—a mere four cents per acre.

- The majority of the people who actually lived in the area—the American Indians of the Great Plains—had not been consulted. Nor had they been given any chance to participate in the discussions. Most of the area had never even been surveyed. As a result, the

French weren't quite sure what they were selling, and the Americans weren't quite sure what they were buying.


President Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

THE EXPEDITION

- President Jefferson chose two army captains, William Clark and Meriwether Lewis, to investigate the new lands. Lewis and Clark had been friends since childhood. They were too young to have fought in the Revolution, though both had seen at least a little military service in the Whiskey Rebellion, a tax revolt that turned violent in 1794 and was quickly suppressed. Lewis had also worked as Jefferson's personal secretary, learning many of the skills that would serve him well on the expedition, including accurate observation, careful logical description, and mapmaking.

- Lewis and Clark shared command of the Corps of Discovery, and soon earned the confidence and trust of their 35 men. Swelled by the presence of a few French voyageurs and trappers, the group was large enough to fight against Indian attacks if necessary, but small enough that it could realistically expect to hunt and forage along the way.

- In the spring of 1804, the group set off from St. Louis, where the Missouri River flows into the Mississippi. They traveled on a keelboat, armed with a mounted cannon, along with several canoes. They headed west, and then followed the great bend in the Missouri River as it turns north through Nebraska and the Dakotas.

- Lewis and Clark maintained strict military discipline to ensure that men on guard duty were wide awake, not dozing or raiding the whiskey supply. They saw prairie dogs, wolves, white pelicans, coyotes, and immense herds of buffalo. A bear attacked Lewis one day while he was hunting, and he had to fling himself into the river to escape.

- Their keelboat, purpose-built the previous year in Pittsburgh, and brought down the Ohio River by Lewis, was laden with gifts and tradable goods to secure their passage through a succession of Indian lands. The Missouri was a treacherous river, and the men often had to drag or winch the keelboat against the current.

- They stopped regularly for exchange of gifts with the Oto, Missouri, Yankton Sioux, and other Indians. Smallpox epidemics had recently swept through many of the villages, severely reducing their populations and weakening them as warrior societies. The president had instructed them to talk with all the Indians they encountered, to avoid conflict if possible, and to do all they could to draw the fur trade into American hands.

- The zigzag meanders of the river made the journey far longer than it would have been by direct line. Despite traveling 1,600 miles, they had only reached part of what is now North Dakota by the time the river began to freeze. They were forced to stop for the winter near a Mandan Indian village. They traded and socialized with the Indians through the winter, and found they had to be very careful to avoid having their equipment stolen.

- When the ice broke the next spring, Lewis and Clark sent the keelboat and some of their men back to St. Louis carrying their notes and findings from the previous year. The main party set off west once more. Their first sight of the Rocky Mountains shattered any hope of a quick and easy portage to the headwaters of the Columbia River.

- The Great Falls of the Missouri made it impossible for Lewis and Clark to carry on by boat, as they had intended. Carrying the boats and

equipment over such a distance would be too time consuming and too exhausting. Instead, they continued on with two large and six small canoes, and only a fraction of their gear.

- When they encountered a band of Shoshone Indians, they discovered, to their pleasant surprise, that Sacagawea, a Native American woman traveling with them, spoke the Shoshone language. She was herself a Shoshone who, years earlier, had been captured in war and sold as a slave. From the Shoshones, they were able to buy 39 horses, which they used to thread their way through the mountains.

- The party eventually found the Snake River, followed it down to its confluence with the Columbia River, then rafted down the Columbia to the shore of the Pacific Ocean. They reached the ocean on November 7, 1805, but were disappointed not to find a U.S. Navy ship awaiting them. It had been there a year previously, but President Jefferson had had no idea it was going to take them two years to reach the other side of the continent.

- Aware that it might be necessary to return overland, they had buried a cache of supplies beside the Great Falls of the Missouri. During their long return journey, Lewis and Clark continued to keep thorough journals, which provided a detailed sense of their environment. They catalogued the animals, birds, and vegetation they encountered, including dozens of previously unidentified species. Their reports also provided a sense of the strength and disposition of the Indians living across the northern and western parts of the continent.

- The Corps of Discovery returned to St. Louis in September 1806, by which time they had been given up for dead by most Americans. The news that they had suffered only one casualty was a source of astonishment then, and of admiration by subsequent historians. In the last weeks of their journey, they encountered several expeditions of fur trappers heading upstream, hardy adventurous men who would crisscross the Rockies and the Great Plains over the next 30 years, until the beaver had been hunted almost to extinction.

Lewis and Clark standing in the wilderness

LATER YEARS

- Clark lived until 1838, and played an important role in the political development of the Midwest. Lewis, by contrast, lived just three more years, and then died, probably by suicide. He had always been more of a loner, subject to fits of depression, and he found it difficult to adapt to life back in the states.

- In one sense, the two men's journey had been a failure. They had not discovered the hoped-for water route to the Pacific (though the knowledge that it did not exist was itself valuable and necessary). In

another way, of course, their journey was a great success. They had immeasurably improved American knowledge of the continent, including its rivers, mountains, flora, fauna, and peoples. They had composed accurate maps, and they made careful descriptions of the previously unknown phenomena they encountered.

- One of their conclusions was that much of the Great Plains was not suitable for settlement. The lack of trees over a vast area meant that there was no wood for building houses, and no fuel for fires. The area was so remote, and the navigable rivers so few, that it was impossibly isolated. Only with the coming of railroads more than 60 years later would settlement of the Great Plains begin.

SUGGESTED READING

Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*.

Gough, *First Across the Continent*.

Jones, *The Essential Lewis and Clark*.

Orsi, *Citizen Explorer*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. When Jefferson bought the Louisiana Territory, did he anticipate its eventual settlement and farming, or did he have other motives? Was it a "Jeffersonian" action?
2. In what sense did Lewis and Clark succeed, and in what sense did they fail? What are the continuing effects of their journey today, both in the lands they crossed and in the American psyche?

Lecture 5

THE FUR TRADE AND THE MOUNTAIN MEN

The standard wisdom in America between 1806 and the 1850s was that the Great Plains were no good for farming. Too remote, treeless, crisscrossed by wild men and wild animals, they seemed more like a great barrier than a land of opportunity. The fur trade, on the other hand, had already been thriving in the American interior for nearly two centuries. Here, and in the Rocky Mountains beyond, it continued and intensified.

THE FUR TRADE

- The fur trade was important from the very beginning of American history. From the late 1500s right through into the 1830s, beaver-fur hats were high status objects in Europe. Furs were the single greatest trade item of the Dutch and French empires in America in the 1600s. A little later, they were the main objective of groups like the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, whose trappers and voyageurs explored the rivers and mountains of Canada.

- Because beaver reproduce relatively slowly, it was all too easy for their populations to be hunted to extinction in areas near the settlements. That's why French voyageurs were moving far into the interior of America by the mid-18th century, not with intention of settling, but simply to find places where the beaver still thrived, and make trading arrangements with Indians who had the skill and the local geographical knowledge to capture them. Not only beaver,

though they were the most precious and sought after. The trade also included the furs of mink, lynx, marten and otters, along with the hides of deer, moose, and even, in the far north, caribou.

- At first it was mainly a matter of bringing beads, metal goods, guns, and cloth from Europe to trade with Indians who actually did the hunting. Both groups liked the terms of trade. From the Europeans' point of view the goods were relatively cheap and easy to make, whereas the beaver furs were extremely valuable. Equally, from the Indians' point of view, beaver were easy enough to catch, so the people were amazed at being able to trade these common items for what were, to them, extremely precious things that they could not make themselves.

- For the Indians, it was a Faustian bargain. The trade goods, especially the guns, enhanced their power within their tribes, and those who had guns also had a great advantage in war against other tribes. But the trade made them more dependent on the whites, because they could not repair the guns or make ammunition. Their dependency increased steadily.

- Indian dependency on white men was much worse when the Europeans discovered that the Indians had an appetite for alcohol, which the European and American fur traders were quick to gratify. This led to intra-tribal violence, fraud, and occasionally complete social breakdown. The combination of epidemics and alcohol traumatized many of the Indian peoples throughout the colonial and early national periods, diminishing some and annihilating others.

- Eventually, Europeans and European-Americans became directly engaged in the search for furs. The *coureur de bois* ("runners in the woods") were French fur-trappers who learned how to use Indian birch-bark canoes, boats that were sturdy enough to carry big loads but light enough to carry across portages. Birch-bark canoes made it possible to travel through areas like upper Wisconsin and Minnesota, which would have been impossible on foot or horseback.

JOHN JACOB ASTOR

- In the wake of the Lewis and Clark expedition, enterprising groups began to plan expeditions up the Missouri and its tributaries to search for furs. The most successful of these entrepreneurs was John Jacob Astor. Astor, a German immigrant, invested heavily in the fur trade, and eventually built a great commercial empire.

- In 1808, Astor established the American Fur Company. The company built a succession of forts along the Missouri River and its tributaries, where Astor's agents bartered with Indian trappers.

- Astor was a master of vertical integration. He developed close contacts with fur dealers throughout Europe. He imported high-quality British manufactured goods at low cost, to be sent to the Indians. Eventually, he assembled a fleet of his own ships to make the transatlantic voyage. He controlled every aspect of the fur trade, and took advantage of great economies of scale. He even courted congressmen to be sure of political help in Washington.

- Astor gradually absorbed or destroyed his competitors in the Missouri River basin. He sent whiskey to the trading posts, cultivating alcoholism among the Indian hunters to put them at a disadvantage when it came time to bargain. Astor himself never entered the mountains or killed a beaver. By 1830, he was a multimillionaire, and was almost certainly the richest man in the United States. Independent fur traders struggled to compete with Astor, sometimes enjoying a few years of success before succumbing to his growing empire.

BEAVER PELTS

- There were various methods of trapping beaver, depending on the season. In the winter, one Indian method of hunting had been to wait until a hard freeze set in, cross the ice of a beaver pond, break open the beaver's lodge with an axe to force them underwater, then shoot them

with arrows when they came up for air in holes the Indians had made. They might also deliberately damage the dam, then shoot the animals when they came up to repair it. The beaver's fur was at its thickest during the winter, so hunting them was primarily a winter activity.

- Skinning the dead beaver was traditionally a job for women. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Indians would make robes out of the skins and wear them for a year before trading them to the Europeans. This custom actually made the furs more valuable, because coarse guard hairs fell out that otherwise would have required careful plucking. Also, the sweat and grease made the skins thicker and shinier—qualities that the hat manufacturers wanted.

- The mountain men of the early 19th century had a different method of trapping the beaver, one that was much less time-consuming and took advantage of improvements in metal technology. They came into the mountains supplied with steel traps, the spring-loaded jaws of which could catch a beaver by its leg. When the panicked and wounded animal attempted to escape into the water, a chain attached to the trap would prevent it from going very far.

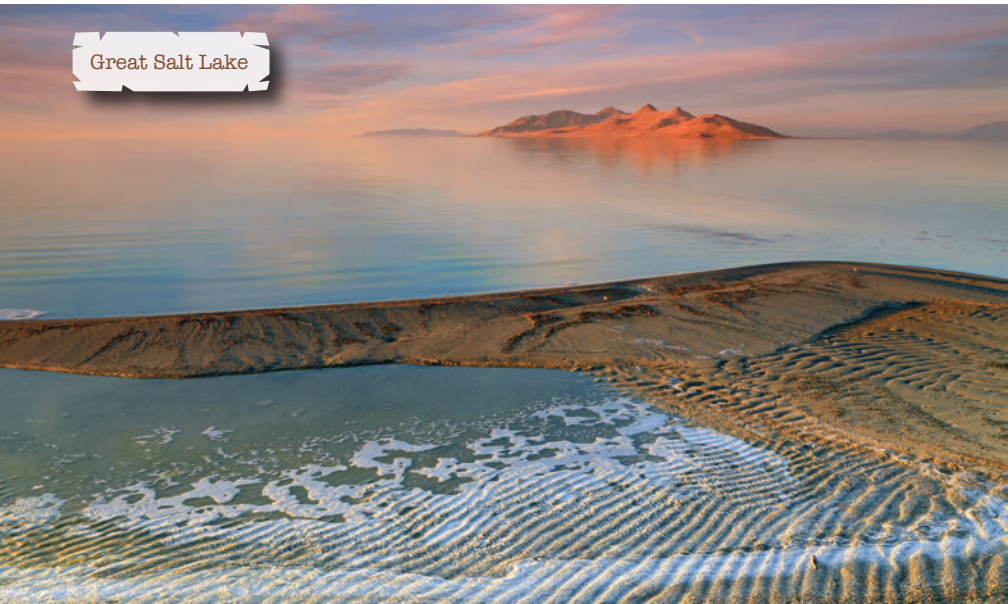
- Bit by bit, the rivers that flow into the Missouri were overhunted, making the beaver locally extinct. Without proper government or conservation measures, and with several companies in desperate competition, it was inevitable. This forced the trappers to move ever higher into the mountains in search of rivers where beavers might still live.

LEGENDS AND LEGACY

- Mountain men had a legendary reputation for self-reliance. Some of them traveled great distances alone, surviving formidable hardships and overcoming seemingly impossible difficulties. But they usually worked in groups, for reasons of safety, sociability, and comprehensive coverage of all the valleys in a particular area.

- Most mountain men were married, usually to Indian women who would then travel with the group. In the face-to-face world of the mountain Indians, the only way to fully gain their trust was to be related to them, and marriage was the obvious method. A trapper would often make a bargain with his prospective bride's father, giving him guns, whiskey, blankets, and horses in exchange for his daughter, after which she became the trapper's property.

- One of the most famous mountain men was Jedediah Smith. In his early twenties, a group he had joined suffered a massacre at the hands of the Arikara Indians. Smith survived the massacre and



fought bravely, which marked him as a future leader. Unlike many of the mountain men, he didn't smoke or drink, didn't marry an Indian wife, didn't gamble, and prayed regularly. He was a good record-keeper and mapmaker, which made him a terrific resource for later historians.

- Another famous mountain man was Kit Carson. Carson, born in Kentucky and raised in Missouri, tried his hand as a teamster, miner, translator, and cook before settling down to the life of hunter and trapper. Carson distinguished himself in the late 1820s and early 1830s as a daring Indian fighter. Whenever his outfit was attacked or robbed, he made a point of setting out to recover lost animals and to inflict vengeance on the attackers. His life story recounts in grisly detail frequent ambushes, surprise attacks, dawn raids, hand-to-hand combat in the snow, and, at the conclusion of almost every tale, the recovery of stolen horses.

- Jim Bridger was another famous mountain man. Bridger was among the first Americans to see the Great Salt Lake. The water was so salty that he believed he had discovered an inlet of the Pacific Ocean. He was also among the first Americans to see the geysers and hot springs of what is now Yellowstone National Park. Competition from Astor's American Fur Company led Bridger and his men to risk trapping in the lands of the warlike Blackfoot Indians. In one encounter, Bridger was shot in the back with an arrow; its barbed point stayed in his body for the next three years.

- When Jed Smith was killed in 1831, the fur trade was still going strong. By 1840, however, Bridger and Carson could see that its end was near. The durable fashion for beaver hats had finally lost out in favor of silk, and the overhunting of the beaver had nearly exhausted the possibilities of the trade. Bridger was quick to adapt to new realities, opening a trading post to supply travelers along the Oregon Trail. Carson became a guide for explorers.

- John Jacob Astor, always the shrewd businessman, got out of the fur business just before it fizzled and shifted his attention to speculation in New York real estate. He was again phenomenally successful, and died in 1848 with an estate worth over $20 million.

SUGGESTED READING

Dolin, *Fur Fortune and Empire*.

Hafen, *Mountain Men and Fur Traders of the Far West*.

McPhee, *The Survival of the Bark Canoe*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What qualities were necessary to thrive as a mountain man? Why do you think so many men were willing to accept the hardships of that life?
2. Are the mountain men of comparable importance to Lewis and Clark as explorers and mappers of the area that now comprises the American West?

Lecture 6

TRAIL OF TEARS

After the Revolution, the rate of migration of Americans to the lands west of the Appalachians increased rapidly, putting pressure on the Native Americans who already lived there. Among them were the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole, self-governing nations often referred to as the Five Civilized Tribes.

THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES

- Beginning in the late 1780s and early 1790s, the policy of the federal government was to encourage members of the Five Civilized Tribes to adapt to settled agriculture, become literate, and convert to Christianity. The switch to American-style agriculture was culturally difficult, as it required men to take on the burden of farm work and give up their long tradition of living as hunters and warriors.

- Nevertheless, some of the Indians took to this new way of life. For example, among the Cherokee, an elite of cotton planters developed,


Sequoyah
(c. 1775–1843)

who bought slaves and joined in the great cotton bonanza sweeping across the South after the invention of the cotton gin. Others became storekeepers and traders. In the 1820s, a Cherokee named Sequoyah worked out a way to write down Cherokee syllables, turning an oral language into one that could also be written.

- In the early 19th century, the five tribes were still sometimes involved in wars against each other, or in conflicts that divided their allegiances. For example, the Red Stick War of 1812–1814 was a civil war among the Creek Indians, between those who favored Christianity and assimilation (the Lower Creeks) and those determined to resist these forces (the Upper Creeks or Red Sticks). When army commander Andrew Jackson fought against the Red Sticks, some of the Lower Creeks fought with him.

- Between 1800 and 1820, a succession of treaties between whites and Indians established the principle that Indian lands in the East might be exchanged for federal lands farther west, which were referred to as Indian Territory. A steady migration of Indians to lands beyond the Mississippi began, creating new communities in what is now Arkansas and Oklahoma.

- Between 1816 and 1820, about 6,000 Cherokee Indians accepted the principle of land exchange and emigrated from their former lands in Georgia and Tennessee. They were provided by the federal government with basic equipment and firearms for the journey. By 1820, about one-third of all Cherokee lived in Indian Territory, along with communities of Delawares, Shawnees, and others who had also migrated under pressure from the United States.

- The Indian Territory in Oklahoma was not merely an empty space waiting for inhabitants. On the contrary, the Osage Indians who lived there before migrations began regarded the arrival of these newcomers as a deadly threat, and took up arms against them. Constant raiding, horse theft, and attacks on travelers by the Osage infuriated the Cherokee.

- A combined group of Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw, all newcomers to the area, attacked an Osage village while many of its men were away hunting. They killed 83 people, took another 100 as prisoners, then burned down the village. The event is remembered as the Massacre of Claremore Mound. A few years later, a hunting party of Osage men took an equally brutal approach when they stumbled on a Kiowa village, killing nearly everyone there.

- White southerners did not care about conditions in the Indians' eventual destination. They just wanted to be rid of them locally, and to acquire their lands and assets. The state of Georgia was particularly aggressive in its eagerness to expel all the Indians within its borders.

THE INDIAN REMOVAL ACT

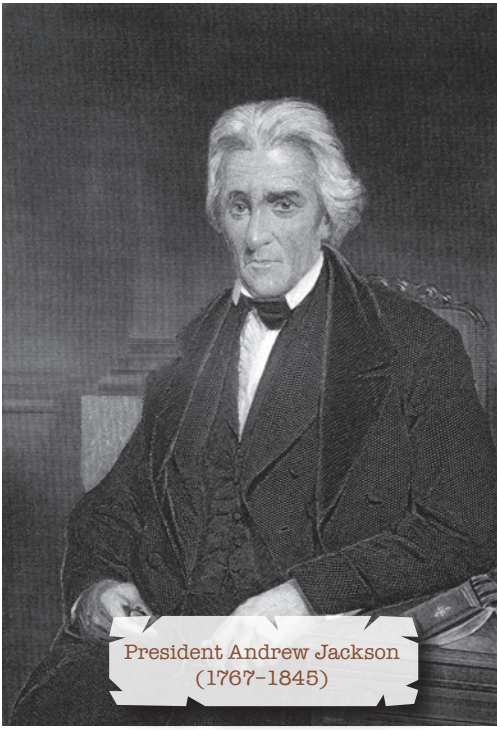
- The discovery of gold in Georgia in 1829 set off the first gold rush in U.S. history. The land where the gold lay, in the Appalachian foothills around Dahlonega, was Cherokee land. The Cherokee described the ensuing events as the Great Intrusion.

- Andrew Jackson's victory in the presidential election of 1828 had increased political support among Americans for Indian removal. Jackson had made his reputation as an Indian fighter, and was quite explicit in favoring the removal of the Indians. Jackson believed that moving the Indians beyond the Mississippi to Indian Territory was not only sensible, but benevolent.

- Jackson's support for Indian removal is probably the biggest stain on his reputation. He is regarded by some historians as the first great presidential champion of popular democracy. Other historians regard him as an advocate of genocide. In 1830, Jackson actively encouraged the passage of legislation known as the Indian Removal Act.

- Americans intent on removing the Indians discovered that it was often possible to divide and conquer. Some tribal leaders, they found, would

sign agreements in exchange for gifts and bribes. It was often unclear in these cases whether the signatories actually had the authority from their people to make these commitments. Resistance sometimes delayed but could not prevent eventual removal.


President Andrew Jackson (1767–1845)

- Not surprisingly, Indian leaders drew different conclusions about how they ought to react to removal. Some took the view that they had already been bullied and badgered enough and must yield no more ground, resisting by force if necessary. Indeed, the removal policy provoked two uprisings: one in the Illinois country, among the Sac and Fox tribes, and one in Florida, among the Seminoles. Both uprisings ended in a disproportionate amount of bloodshed. Other Indians, having witnessed these failed uprisings, favored trading their land for new lands farther west.

THE TRAIL OF TEARS

- Beginning in the summer of 1838, thousands of Indians, many of them Cherokee, were forcibly removed from their lands in Georgia and taken to Oklahoma. The weather conditions, the difficulty of the travel, and the scarcity of accommodations and food all demonstrated the inadequacy of the government's preparations. Many Cherokee were still traveling when winter set in. Around 16,000 people were moved

in total. Historians' estimates of the casualty rate range from 4,000 to 8,000, but all agree that it was a catastrophic journey.

- Old wounds took a long time to heal following relocation to Oklahoma, and the people struggled to adapt to a radically new environment. The landscape was much drier and less forested, the winters much colder than in Georgia. Further complicating matters were uneasy relations between Cherokee who had been relocated years before and were now well established in Indian Territory—the so-called Old Settlers—and the newcomers.

- The Old Settlers were traditionalists; they had been willing to move partly because of their reluctance to adopt the Americans' customs, religion, and way of life. Sequoyah, the man who had developed a written language for the Cherokee and who had moved with the Old Settlers, brokered an agreement. At a meeting in the summer of 1839, the two groups agreed to create the Cherokee Nation, with representative institutions, a new written constitution, and a capital at Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

- One of the ironies of this history is that the Five Civilized Tribes had accepted the institution of slavery, and practiced it in their new homes. Only about 10 percent of them owned slaves, and there was some intermarriage between African-Americans, Creeks, and Seminoles despite laws to prohibit it. Even so, it was degrading and repressive to its victims. Nearly all the displaced Indians in Oklahoma were pro-Confederate during the Civil War, where slaves did not achieve emancipation until 1865.

- Indian removal laid the foundations of the later reservation system. The Indian Department of the federal government was founded in 1834, and later developed into the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Before long, the idea of Oklahoma as a place comprised of distinct Indian nations began to break down, as Western migration across the plains accelerated in the mid- to late 1860s.

SUGGESTED READING

Baird and Goble, *Oklahoma*.

Perdue and Greene, *The Cherokee Removal*.

Smith, *An American Betrayal*.

Sturgis, *The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should historians judge the morality of Indian removal, or confine themselves to an examination of the time and place in which it occurred?
2. Could the Cherokee and the other "civilized tribes" have avoided their displacement, or was it inevitable?

Lecture 7

STRUGGLES OF THE PLAINS INDIANS

Until 1830, the Indians of the Great Plains lived lives dictated largely by tradition. Between 1830 and 1890, however, the arrival of migrants, gold-seekers, settlers, soldiers, and railways changed the world of the Plains Indians beyond recognition. Even tribes with only slight contact with whites felt demographic pressure, as other tribes, displaced westward, tried to adapt to life on the plains.

ACCOUNTS AND RECOLLECTIONS

- Indirect contact with whites often had profound effects on Indian cultures. Possession of firearms, for example, enabled the groups that had them to dominate or destroy rival groups that didn't, but also made them dependent on the whites. Similarly, the status of traditional goods diminished as durable and colorful items like glass beads and metal pots entered the Indians' economies.

- Many Indian peoples were nomadic. Others moved in response to population shifts elsewhere. As a result, determining their origins and relationships, and keeping track of their whereabouts, can be difficult for scholars. Several major language groups have been identified, each with numerous dialects. Some tribes split from common ancestors. Others amalgamated after wars or epidemics, or banded together in the face of new enemies.

- Because the Plains Indians were nonliterate, we know about their early history only indirectly. The main sources are white travelers' tales, such as the journals of Lewis and Clark, and the letters of the artist George Catlin. At their best, these sources are very rich and illuminating. They include a wealth of fascinating stories about how white visitors understood their hosts' way of life. On the other hand, they sometimes carry a burden of wishful thinking. Catlin, for example, sometimes got carried away by the concept of the Indian as noble savage.

- Other sources for information about the Plains Indians include archaeology and the narrative testimony of later generations. By the early 1900s, when the Indians no longer presented any conceivable threat to the whites, a generation of historians interviewed older Indians to learn about their traditional way of life and their memories of childhood. Such sources are valuable, but are subject to nostalgia and the usual hazards of failing memory.

BUFFALO, HORSES, AND DOGS

- Buffalo were central to the way of life of Plains Indians. Tens of millions of buffalo wandered the plains. It was unimaginable in the early 19th century that such a plentiful creature could be driven to the brink of extinction in just a few decades. The Plains Indians had learned how to make their clothes from buffalo hides, as well as their tipis. They ate buffalo meat, used the animals' sinews for their bowstrings, and their bones for cutting and scraping tools. The paunch and large intestines were used as containers. Buffalo hair was fashioned into ropes, or webbing for snowshoes.

- So long as the Indians had gone on foot, it was extraordinarily difficult to hunt and kill a buffalo. In midwinter they could sometimes be hunted by men wearing snowshoes, which kept them on the surface of the snow while the animals plunged through its hard crust and became vulnerable. In mountain districts, Indians built buffalo jumps—

v-shaped lanes that narrowed toward a neck at the top of a cliff. The idea was to lure a group of buffalo into the trap, then stampede them from behind, forcing those at the front to topple over the cliff. It took a high degree of collaborative work to build a viable buffalo jump, but could be spectacularly successful once in operation.

- Making an operation like this work required a high degree of skill, coordination, and individual self-discipline. It was usually surrounded by rituals to give a supernatural reinforcement to the process. Buffalo jumps were wasteful, of course, in that they tended to kill far more animals than could then be used for food. Historians discount the romantic notion that the Indians were natural environmentalists living in perfect harmony with their surroundings.

- The appearance of horses on the Great Plains was immensely significant. Suddenly it became possible to hunt buffalo from horseback, which meant a greater success rate in hunts, and more meat in the Indians' diet. Mounted hunters learned how to cut an animal out from the herd and ride alongside it, dodging its charges while shooting arrows into its body until it fell.

- After a successful hunt, the meat and hides were taken back to the camp, at which point women would take over the preservation of the hides, and the cutting of the meat into strips. George Catlin related his surprise that Mandan women knew how to preserve meat in hot weather without using salt, something he had thought to be impossible. When Francis Parkman lived with a Sioux band in 1846, he described how he found it difficult to enjoy daily meals of buffalo meat because it was unsalted.

- The domestication of horses meant not only improved hunting prospects. It also meant that, once mounted, the Indians could travel farther than their grandfathers. They could more easily come into contact with other peoples, sometimes for trade but often for warfare, and there is evidence to suggest that the frequency of warfare increased after 1700. Mounted men will nearly always defeat infantry,

so the possession of horses became strategically vital. Horse stealing became an honored and respected activity among the men.

- Horses had other effects on the Plains Indians' way of life. Their use as beasts of burden meant that nomadic or seminomadic people could now carry more with them when they moved, accumulate more material goods, and distinguish themselves from one another by their wealth. Ownership of horses, in fact, was a primary measure of wealth and status.

- In the High Plains, where the growing season is short and rainfall low, horses stressed and degraded the environment. They became rivals to buffalo for available nutrition. While horses alone did not drive the buffalo to near-extinction, they were a contributing factor. Others were intensive overhunting, disease, and a succession of severe droughts in the middle decades of the century.

- Before they owned horses, the Plains Indians had lived with domesticated dogs, whom they regarded as sensible and intelligent. When a village was moving, dogs were expected to carry packs or drag travois.

ROLES AND RITUALS

- Francis Parkman shared the common impression that women worked extremely hard and were accorded very low status among the Plains Indian tribes. Recent Native American historians have reinterpreted the evidence, arguing that men and women worked equally hard on different tasks, and that women were not intrinsically subordinate.

- The Sioux with whom Parkman traveled were nomadic. Every few weeks, they would move their camp to areas where their horses would enjoy fresh pasture, and where they hoped to encounter the wandering buffalo herds. Once a year, they made a journey into the hills, where they cut wood for their tent poles and travois. Heavy snows

during the winter restricted their ability to move; they would generally winter in heavily wooded river valleys.

- Other groups of Plains Indians were more static, and relied on a mix of hunting and farming. The Mandan were one of many such tribes that settled along the Missouri River and its tributaries, living largely on corn, beans, and squash. The Mandan lived in big lodges made of wood and earth, sited beyond the high water mark of the annual river floods.

- White visitors were impressed by Mandan rituals. Lewis and Clark described a winter ceremony in which young men urged the tribe's oldest men to have sex with their wives. If an old man refused, the young one would plead, and sometimes throw in the gift of a good buffalo robe, until he got consent. What did it mean? Clark wrote: "All this is to cause the buffalo to come near so that they may kill them."

- The lives of Plains Indian warriors and hunters were fraught with danger. Men frequently died in war or in hunting accidents in their late teens, twenties, and thirties. Anyone who reached old age was assumed to have supernatural powers and to have befriended the Great Spirit.

- The whites who visited and lived with Indian tribes in the first half of the 19th century foresaw, accurately, that the Indians' way of life would soon pass away. Francis Parkman, who was only 23 during his visit to the Sioux, wanted to experience their way of life before it vanished forever. He believed it would enable him to recount more accurately the history of earlier Indian communities and the Indian wars of the 18th century. Many of the whites did not regret the passing of the Indians, however, because they saw them as a threat to the future of American civilization.

- From our vantage point, it's important to keep two things in mind. The first is a sense of shame at the constant defrauding and overpowering of the American Indians. The second is recognition that for the whites who came into contact with them, they were genuinely terrifying. They did attack frontier communities. They did steal horses. They did

torture their war captives to death. They did become appallingly drunk when they had the opportunity, and drunkenness often led directly to lethal violence.

- It is impossible to understand the dynamics of Western history through the 19th century unless we take seriously the intensity of the fear that the Indians provoked in most whites. The tiny minority of white people who lived with and came to understand the Indians, and to sympathize with their plight, were outnumbered thousands to one by those who only saw them from the outside, and reacted with revulsion and fear.

SUGGESTED READING

Carlson, *The Plains Indians*.

Fowler, *American Indians of the Great Plains*.

Hansen, *Memory and Vision*.

Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did the arrival of horses transform the lives of the Native Americans on the Great Plains? Were they consequently more or less vulnerable than the Five Civilized Tribes in their encounters with whites?
2. What are the special difficulties of studying the history of people who are nomadic and nonliterate?

Lecture 8

REBELLIOUS TEXAS AND THE ALAMO

In the early 19th century, there were conflicting views about the southwestern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase. Some Americans claimed that it was the Rio Grande, the river that marks the present-day boundary between Texas and Mexico. Spain, which owned the territory that would later become Mexico, believed the boundary was the Red River, which is much farther north. Thousands of square miles were therefore in dispute.

SPAIN AND MEXICO

- At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Spain was in chaos. Its colonial authorities in New Spain found it difficult to assert their authority, and were becoming anxious about the rapid westward expansion of the United States. The Spanish foresaw that Americans would try to overrun Texas, but there were limits on what they could do about it.

- In 1819, by the terms of the Adams-Onis Treaty, Spain ceded Florida to the United States. In return, the United States agreed to recognize that the boundary of Texas was the Sabine River, which today marks the border between the states of Louisiana and Texas. In 1821, however, the issue was cast into doubt when Mexico broke away from Spain.

- Mexico, newly independent, faced an array of daunting problems. The country was riven with acute regional divisions, which were worsened by racial and class antagonisms. It was ethnically and linguistically diverse, and was burdened by an intolerant church and the remnants of medieval traditions, most of which contradicted its new aspiration to republican liberty. At a time when the American economy was taking off, the Mexican economy remained stagnant, with few signs of entrepreneurial initiative.

- Mexico was no better able to exercise control over Texas than Spain had been. So the new government undertook a daring experiment: It invited people of any nationality to take Mexican citizenship, convert to Roman Catholicism, and settle in Texas. Mexico gambled that immigrants would come to identify more strongly with their adopted country than with their country of origin. They would also bear the brunt of ferocious Comanche raids.

THE EMPRESARIOS

- One of the first groups to settle in the area was led by Stephen Austin. Austin's group settled along the Brazos River in 1822. His father, Moses

Austin, had made an arrangement with Mexico, but died before he could carry it out. His son made good on the arrangement, bringing 900 American families into Mexico. Austin was the first of many men known at the time as the empresarios. The empresarios agreed to bring in a certain number of settlers in exchange for very generous land grants and a six-year exemption from taxation.

- By the late 1820s, the Mexican government was becoming alarmed at the rate of immigration from America. Some of the immigration was legal, organized by the empresarios, and some of it illegal, as opportunists in search of land simply crossed the border on their own initiative and set up farms or plantations.

- In 1825, America's ambassador to Mexico, Joel Poinsett, asked on behalf of President John Quincy Adams whether the United States might purchase Texas from the Mexico. His successor, Anthony Butler, proposed to President Andrew Jackson the idea of an American military expedition to seize the territory by force.

- In 1826, one empresario, Haden Edwards, tried to create an independent state around his land grant. He named it the Republic of Fredonia. Horrified, Stephen Austin led his own colony's militia in support of a Mexican army column to suppress Edwards's rebellion. Edwards fled back to the United States.

- In 1830, Mexican president Anastasio Bustamente suspended American immigration and abolished slavery throughout Mexico. Many American settlers had brought slaves with them, and were infuriated by these new regulations. They also protested the enforcement of customs duties, which had lately become more rigorous.

- Bustamente's successor was Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, a popular soldier. Santa Anna began his political career as a liberal. In 1834, he did an about-face, abolishing Mexico's original constitution and declaring himself dictator. One of Santa Anna's goals was to increase Mexican control over turbulent provinces like Texas.

- Among the American settlers in Texas, two distinct parties emerged. The first was the Peace Party, whose most luminous representative was Stephen Austin. Austin believed in negotiating with the Mexican government, redressing grievances one by one. The second group, the War Party, had given up on this possibility. The War Party's most notable representatives were two relative newcomers, William Travis and Sam Houston.

- Austin was converted to the War Party's point of view when, after traveling to Mexico City for negotiations in 1833, he was imprisoned for suspected disloyalty. He was kept there for two years. By the time he was released, Austin had been disabused once and for all from the notion that his people's future lay with Mexico. In 1835, the Americans in Texas rebelled.

THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE

- In early 1836, the American settlers declared Texas an independent republic, and elected Henry Smith as their first governor. Sam Houston was elected commander of the army. To the disgust of many Texans, Houston began his command with a long tactical retreat. It was a shrewd move, however, reminiscent of maneuvers made by George Washington toward the beginning of the American Revolution.

- Santa Anna responded to news of the Texas rebellion by leading an army of 6,000 men on a forced march north. Many were peasant conscripts who had never left home before. Others were convicts swept from Mexico's jails. Nearly all were poorly trained and inadequately supplied. It was a winter campaign, and featured heavy rains, cold weather, and a freakish blizzard.

- In 1836, American and Mexican forces met at the old, half-ruined mission church of San Antonio de Valero, better known as the Alamo. The Alamo was an American strongpoint, but it was not easy to defend. Its crumbling walls and large perimeter were garrisoned by a mere 150 men. The rebels were led by William Travis and Jim Bowie.

- Houston had ordered Travis and his men to abandon the Alamo, rightly foreseeing that it was indefensible, and that its garrison would be of more use in Houston's army. Travis ignored the order, closing a series of defiant letters with the valediction "victory or death."

- Most of the men inside the Alamo were recent arrivals in Texas, including Bowie—a slave trader, smuggler, and notorious knife-fighter—and the half-legendary frontiersman Davy Crockett. Until recently, Crockett had been a Whig congressman from Tennessee.

- After a 13-day siege, Santa Anna's force overwhelmed the defenders and killed the survivors, suffering 600 casualties in the process. Jim Bowie's mother, on hearing the news that her son had died at the

Alamo, commented: "I'll wager no wounds were found in his back." The event became one of the defining events in Texas history.

- A second army, led by Mexican general José de Urrea, defeated a Texan force in the town of Goliad. Just as Santa Anna had killed all the men at the Alamo, so Urrea massacred 371 prisoners of war, further poisoning relations between Mexicans and the Texans.

- For a month, Houston continued to retreat, and Santa Anna continued to advance. Finally, on April 21, 1836, Houston turned and fought. His 800 men, shouting "Remember the Alamo!" surprised the Mexican force of approximately 1,500. The fighting lasted barely half an hour, after which the victorious Texans slaughtered hundreds of Mexican prisoners of war. Santa Anna himself fled the battlefield, but was later captured and forced to sign a treaty ending the war, acknowledging Texas as an independent state, and setting its southern boundary at the Rio Grande.

- The Battle of San Jacinto turned Texas independence from an idea into a reality. The newly independent Texans at once convened a congress to affirm the legality of slavery. It is one of the great embarrassments of Texas history that the revolution was undertaken in part to ensure the continuation of slavery in an area that had recently

The Battle of San Jacinto

abolished it. The Texas revolutionaries said they were fighting for freedom and against tyranny, but their idea of the group to whom this freedom applied was sharply limited by race.

INDEPENDENCE AND STATEHOOD

- Many Texans hoped that their newly independent state would now be incorporated into the United States of America. The politics of the 1830s made the idea controversial, however. It was clear that Texas, if admitted to the Union, would be a slave state. It would therefore increase the power of the proslavery forces in Congress.

- A growing sentiment in the North opposed the spread of slavery into new territories and states. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 required states to join the Union in pairs—one where slavery would be legal, one where it would be illegal—in order to preserve the balance in the Senate.

- Texas remained independent for the moment, even though many of its people wanted to join the United States and saw that result as inevitable. Andrew Jackson declined to push the matter in Congress, though he did give Texas diplomatic recognition on his last day in office. His successor, Martin Van Buren, took the same view. One by one, the nations of Europe also recognized Texas as an independent republic.

- Sam Houston was elected president of Texas. He and his presidential successors had to deal with two major issues. The first was Mexico's refusal to accept that Texan independence was now a reality. Fighting resumed in 1841, as small, vicious armies moved back and forth across the Rio Grande. The second was the depredations of the Comanche, who had dominated northwest Texas for a century.

- Once Texas became independent, the number of Americans arriving rose sharply. The population rose from approximately 50,000 to

approximately 150,000 over the course of the republic's 10-year history. This meant more pressure on Comanche land, which intensified the violence.

- The fight against the Comanche was a major burden on Texas's treasury. By the time it finally joined the United States, in 1845, Texas was on the brink of bankruptcy. By the terms of its accession, Congress agreed to take responsibility for the state's debts. Texas, meanwhile, agreed to relinquish its claims on lands to the west.

SUGGESTED READING

Haley, *Passionate Nation*.

McComb, *Texas*.

Morgan, *Lions of the West*.

Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How would you evaluate the wisdom or folly of Mexico's inviting American settlers to the province of Texas in the 1820s and early 1830s?
2. What are the lasting consequences of the fact that Texas was an independent republic for nearly a decade?

Lecture 9

TRAVELING THE OREGON TRAIL

In the early 1840s, a tide of immigration to the region known as the Oregon Country began. Over the next three decades, approximately 350,000 immigrants traveled from the Midwest to the fertile valley of the Willamette River. The route they followed, the Oregon Trail, has since become a symbol of westward migration.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- In 1792, an American sea captain named Robert Gray sailed into the mouth of the Columbia River from the Pacific Ocean, the first American to do so. He soon met George Vancouver of Britain's Royal Navy, who was exploring and mapmaking in the same area. Vancouver went on to chart Puget Sound, where Seattle now stands, and to claim the area for Britain.

- In 1811, John Jacob Astor built a fur-trading fort near the mouth of the Columbia River, on the site of present-day Astoria. The North West Company, a British fur company, built their own forts along the river, and claimed the area for the British Empire.

- In the 1810s and 1820s, Britain and the United States agreed to share the lands that now comprise Washington and Oregon. The region was still of interest mainly for the fur trade, and had virtually no permanent white settlers.

- In 1834, an American Methodist mission arrived in the region. Additional missions were soon founded, and a handful of pioneers began to try their luck at farming. Little by little, the sheer number of Americans coming to the area began to strengthen America's claim to Oregon.

- By the late 1830s, mountain men and fur traders had beaten a path from the Midwest to the Pacific. It was long, monotonous, and full of hazards—both natural and human—but experience had shown that it could be done.

- The British and American governments both made threatening noises about their rights in the Oregon Country. But both governments knew that to go to war again, as they had in 1812, would be ridiculous. They had far more interests in common than points of difference.

- Millions of pounds of cotton were being shipped from American plantations to the great factories of industrial England, an immensely

profitable business for both nations. In 1846, the two countries signed a treaty agreeing to a boundary along the 49th parallel, where it has remained ever since.

THE GOING GETS ROUGH

- Each year, the number of travelers along the Oregon Trail increased, starting around 1,000 in 1843 and rising to about 55,000 in 1850. An orthodoxy developed concerning the best way to go. The starting point was usually Independence, Missouri, or one of the towns nearby. The ideal starting time was early April, once the snow had thawed and the mud it created had begun to harden. The earlier in the year a wagon train set off, the better its chances of arriving in Oregon before winter.

- Wagons had to be sturdy to withstand the Oregon Trail's 2,000 miles of rough ground, deserts, mountains, and river crossings. Properly made, these wagons could carry 2,500 pounds of people, furniture, and supplies. They had wooden wheels, iron tires, and no shock absorption of any kind. The wagons were uncomfortable at best, and went only at the pace of plodding oxen or mules.

- Only families with some ready money could undertake the journey. They would need at least half a year's food supply, along with guns and ammunition, spare parts for the wagons, and camping gear, plus additional money for river crossing tolls, starting costs for their planned new farms in Oregon, and all other contingencies. Often the sale of a family farm in the East or Midwest created the stake for the crossing. On arrival in Oregon, many families were nearly destitute after incurring unanticipated costs and meeting unexpected troubles along the way.

- Lewis and Clark and the early mountain men had followed the course of the Missouri River, but the Oregon Trail took a more direct route, up the Platte River. It is too shallow and treacherous to travel by boat, but it was a clear marker for the trail itself. The key to the whole route was South Pass in western Wyoming, the lowest and easiest crossing of the

Rocky Mountains. From there, the trail crossed what is now southern Idaho, along the course of the Snake River, bypassed a giant bend of that river, then rejoined it near its confluence with the Columbia River.

- A separate route, the California Trail, branched off beyond South Pass and headed southward through Nevada. It became as heavily traveled as the section that continued to Oregon after the discovery of gold in California in 1848.

- Settlers traveling the Oregon Trail next followed the Columbia River, which is now dammed along almost its entire length but was then wild and treacherous. This was the most dangerous part of the whole route. By the time immigrant trains got there, their members were often exhausted, depleted, sick, and half-destitute. It was common in the early days for immigrant trains to send out urgent requests for help in the last leg of the journey, and for Oregonians to head inland to help them.

- Immigrants on the Oregon Trail were mainly from the Midwest—Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Iowa—and largely from families whose ancestral origin was British. Most came from families that had moved several times before, as part of the great migration over the Appalachians

and ever westward that followed the American Revolution. Familiar with the work involved in creating new farmland, and hungry for opportunity, they believed they could find better land in a better climate by going to Oregon. The economic depression of 1837 was an additional goad to seek opportunities elsewhere.

- Immigrants set off in large groups, partly for the sake of mutual aid and partly as protection against Indian attacks. Often the members of extended families traveled together. Many of them hired old mountain men as guides to take them through Indian country. Larger wagon trains drew up written rules of conduct to be observed along the way, and clear lines of authority to deal with the possibility of conflict.

- In practice, there was a good deal of cooperation and barter between Indians and travelers along the Oregon Trail. The Indians, for their part, were astonished at the sheer number of people coming year after year across their traditional hunting lands. They had had no conception until then of just how many Americans there were. Some tried to charge tolls. Others insisted on being treated to whisky or coffee.

- Other hazards besetting the emigrants were the burning summer heat, which could bring temperatures of more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit; the danger of epidemic diseases, particularly cholera, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and smallpox; accidents; and the possibility of getting lost. Records provide glimpses of wagons breaking down, children being trampled by livestock or bitten by snakes, hunting parties failing to return, and poorly marked shortcuts failing to rejoin the main trail.

- For those who survived the Oregon Trail, especially its exhausting final stages, the center of their new home was Oregon City, on the banks of the Willamette River. By 1846, the year in which the United States confirmed by treaty its possession of Oregon, the city had more than 1,000 inhabitants, an iron foundry, flour mills, and sawmills, along with several churches, a library, a meeting hall, and a newspaper. After hard early years, many of the migrants were able to establish farms, and to prosper there, just as they had hoped.

MORMON PIONEERS

- In 1847, an exceptional group of Americans came along the trail, not with the intention of traveling all the way to Oregon, but in the hope that they could leave behind a recent history of suffering and persecution. These were the Mormons.

- The Mormons—also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints—were a home-grown American religious group that began in the 1820s. Joseph Smith, an upstate New York farm boy, is said to have been visited by an angel who guided him to a set of inscribed golden tablets. The translation of the words on the tablets

Mormon temple in Salt Lake City

became the *Book of Mormon*. The book describes the fortunes of a great people living in the Western Hemisphere during the time of Christ, and tells of Jesus's appearance in America after his mission in the Holy Land.

- Joseph Smith, the church's founder, inspired passionate loyalty from some people, prompting them to convert to his religion. In others he provoked passionate opposition, which became all the more intense when word spread that his new sect preached and practiced polygamy. Moving frequently to avoid persecution, but hated all over again in each new home, their early history reached a tragic climax with the assassination of Smith at Carthage, Illinois, in 1844.

- Smith's successor, Brigham Young, concluded from their early history that only by fleeing from the United States altogether could the Mormons hope to live according to their principles. With military discipline and constant exhortations to piety, he gathered a group of 173 pioneers and led them across the Great Plains in 1847.

- After a hard journey through the Wasatch Mountains, Young's pioneers descended into the Salt Lake Valley, between the mountains and the Great Salt Lake. Young decided that the area would be their new home, and named it Deseret. It was indeed harsh desert land, beside a vast inland sea whose waters were far too salty to drink.

- The Mormons laid out a city, broke ground for a temple, planted crops, and began to divert mountain rivers to give themselves a supply of fresh water. They then sent word back to their starting point that they had located a new home. In the ensuing 20 years, thousands of Mormons followed this initial group, sometimes rolling their possessions in hand carts across the plains. Salt Lake City, founded in 1847, prefigured the other desert cities that would spring up in the West in the coming decades.

- The great irony of the Mormon trek was that it almost instantly lost its original rationale. Determined to get out of the United States

once and for all, the Utah Mormons actually witnessed their territory incorporated into the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, only one year after their arrival. Another 50 years would pass, however, before the states and the Mormons of Utah were fully reconciled.

SUGGESTED READING

DeVoto, *1846*.

Dodds, *The American Northwest*.

Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*.

Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does the concept of Manifest Destiny have any value as a way to interpret western migration in the 1840s and 1850s, or should we look at it as simply a cynical rationalization for conquest and expansion?
2. In moving to Utah, were the Mormons under Brigham Young reenacting the journey made by the Pilgrims nearly 250 years earlier? What were the important similarities and differences?

Lecture 10

MANIFEST DESTINY AND THE MEXICAN WAR

In the Mexican War, the United States took control of modern-day California, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, and New Mexico. Some Americans were disappointed with this outcome, believing that America should have taken over the whole of Mexico. Others were scandalized by the entire conflict, viewing the war as an act of brazen aggression by the United States and a sinister extension of the power of slavery.

SETTING THE STAGE

- At the time the war with Mexico began, the United States had fought only small conflicts against Indian bands since the end of the War of 1812. This meant that an entire generation of American soldiers had no experience of fighting a large-scale opponent that used European-style formations and artillery.

- The American war effort was also compromised by internal conflict. The American president, James K. Polk, was a highly partisan Democrat. His senior generals in the field, Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, were equally partisan Whigs, and he knew that they both had designs on the White House for themselves. Their success would make Polk's reelection less likely.

- Taylor and Scott came to detest each other, and they both hated the many other officers who had been given military commands because of their political and personal connections to the president. The army and the navy found it equally hard to cooperate. Army regulars detested the volunteer soldiers who entered the service just for this war, and lacked a sense of discipline or respect for tradition.

- Somehow, this squabbling array of American forces won a succession of spectacular battlefield victories. Mexico's politicians incorrectly believed that Britain and France would intervene on their side out of fear that the United States was becoming too powerful. Mexican army officers also believed that their force was greatly superior to the U.S. army, even though it had been humiliated a decade earlier by Sam Houston's force of Texans at San Jacinto.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE

- Ever since Texas's rebellion in 1836, war between the United States and Mexico had seemed likely. Mexican leader Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna had signed the Treaty of Velasco after the Battle of San Jacinto,

having good reason to expect that he would be killed if he did not cooperate. The treaty said that Texan independence was recognized by Mexico, and that the southern border of Texas was the Rio Grande.

- Santa Anna was immediately overthrown, however, and the government that succeeded him rejected the treaty out of hand. At this point, Texas was an independent republic, not yet part of the United States. Mexico never gave diplomatic recognition to Texas, and twice reinvaded it in the early 1840s. In 1845, Texas became part of the United States.

- Another point of contention between the United States and Mexico was California. As growing numbers of American immigrants traveled overland to the Pacific coast, clamor to acquire Oregon and California increased. President James Polk sympathized with the idea of acquiring California, and soon after his 1845 inauguration sent a diplomat, John Slidell, to see whether Mexico might to sell. The Mexican authorities indignantly refused even to see Slidell.

- Santa Anna, despite his earlier humiliation, again rose to power in Mexico. Santa Anna had assured Polk that he would broker a favorable peace treaty if he were allowed to return to Mexico. Polk facilitated his return, but soon discovered that Santa Anna had no intention of honoring his promise. The historian Otis Singletary wrote later: "Whatever results President Polk might have been expecting, there is no escaping the ironic fact that his ultimate achievement was to have aided in placing in command of the enemy's army the most competent soldier in their service. The price for this amateurish dabbling was soon paid in American lives."

ON THE OFFENSIVE

- Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to cross the Nueces River and advance to the Rio Grande—in other words, to invade the disputed territory. When a Mexican cavalry column attacked some of Taylor's

men north of the Rio Grande, Polk used it as a pretext to declare war. He said in a speech to Congress that "Mexico has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil."

- General Taylor won a series of battlefield victories in 1846 and early 1847. American artillery proved to be accurate and lethal, and Mexican casualties were disproportionately heavy in these engagements. Taylor scored his final and greatest victory against Santa Anna, at the Battle of Buena Vista in 1847, despite the fact that Taylor's army was outnumbered nearly 4:1.

- Among the American soldiers at Buena Vista was Jefferson Davis, leader of a Mississippi regiment. Later, of course, Davis would become president of the Confederate States of America. Political careers often begin with military achievements. Zachary Taylor, for example, became wildly popular back home. His victories laid the foundation for a successful presidential campaign in 1848—exactly what Polk had foreseen and dreaded.

General Zachary Taylor at the Battle of Buena Vista

- California, meanwhile, fell to two tiny army columns, a handful of adventurous settlers, and a few sailors and marines. The Americans' numbers were slight, but the long-term historical significance of their victory was immense.

- By the end of 1846, Polk had realized that Taylor's army was too far away from Mexico City to bring the war to an end. So the president dispatched another American army, with orders to land on the Caribbean coast of Mexico, secure a beachhead, march to Mexico City, and capture the city if possible.

- Led by General Winfield Scott, a force of 12,000 men landed on the east coast of Mexico in the largest amphibious operation in American history to that point. Among Scott's staff officers was Robert E. Lee. Scott went on to win a series of victories even more impressive than those won by Taylor. Plagued by disease in the ranks, a disparity of numbers, and poor communications, Scott's army was nevertheless able to take Mexico City in autumn of 1847.

- Mexican authorities found it difficult to negotiate a treaty ending the war, as lines of authority inside the country were so uncertain. Santa Anna, discredited, fled the country. Some Mexican politicians wanted to carry on fighting. Others, fearing popular rebellion and the possibility of a race war, saw negotiation as essential. When the latter group prevailed, Mexico agreed to cede much of its northern territory to the United States, and to formally relinquish its claims to ownership of Texas.

- When American negotiators returned to Washington with these terms, the president was furious; he had been among those anticipating even greater acquisitions. Polk recognized, however, that the war was becoming politically unpopular, particularly among New Yorkers and residents of New England. Pragmatically, he chose to accept the treaty, and soon persuaded Congress to ratify it.

THE WAR'S AFTERMATH


David Wilmot
(1814–1868)

- The alignment of forces around the Mexican War contributed to the later onset of the American Civil War. American antislavery advocates had long decried the war, suspecting that it would lead to the acquisition of new slave states. Outspoken critics of the war included former president John Quincy Adams, now a member of the House of Representatives, and an Illinois congressman named Abraham Lincoln.

- Most Democrats were in favor of the war, as were most Southerners and Westerners. One politician among the Democrats, David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania congressman, proposed that slavery should be banned from any territories gained by the war, as a way of disarming critics who suspected a slave-power conspiracy. The House of Representatives passed Wilmot's proviso, but it was rejected by the Senate. In both houses, the vote was divided along sectional lines—another ominous sign of division.

- The outcome of the Mexican War was highly significant even beyond its effects on American political division. The areas that the United States took from Mexico—California, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah—are now parts of the richest country on the continent, and the most powerful in the history of the world. The areas that remained part of Mexico, by contrast, remain desperately poor and unstable.

- Soon after the United States acquired California, gold was discovered in its hills—gold that had laid unnoticed through 350 years of Spanish and Mexican occupation. The gold rush that followed transformed the politics, demography, and economy of the United States, and for the first time gave the American far West an almost irresistible mass appeal.

SUGGESTED READING

Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*.

DeVoto, *1846*.

Singletary, *The Mexican War*.

Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What factors led Mexico to fight a war it must have known it was going to lose? How might its politicians have acted more sensibly?
2. Can you see ways in which disagreements over the Mexican War helped lay the groundwork for the American Civil War? Was slavery actually a significant issue in the conflict of the 1840s?

Lecture 11

THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

Gold stands front and center in the history of the Americas. Spanish conquistadors searched for it, and destroyed the Aztec empire for it. When English colonization began, goldsmiths and jewelers were among the first settlers. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 set off a stampede, transforming the political, economic, and demographic history of the United States.

THE RUSH BEGINS

- The first discoveries came at Sutter's Mill, near Coloma, California, in 1848. The name refers to Johann Sutter, a Swiss immigrant and merchant in northern California. Sutter built a fort and trading station near the place where the American River flows into the Sacramento River. That place is now the center of Sacramento, California's capital.

- Sutter sent one of his employees, James Marshall, 40 miles upriver to build a sawmill in the Coloma Valley. From there, logs could be cut and then floated downriver to the fort. Marshall found specks of gold in the mill's flume, the channel of water that powered the mill's operations. He told Sutter, who swore his employees to secrecy. Despite Sutter's precautions, word of the discovery began to spread.

- Soon everyone who could find a way to get to California began planning how to do it. People already living in California flocked to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada to explore the hundreds of small rivers and streams that flow down from the mountains.

- For prospectors from the East, California was nearly inaccessible at first. By 1849, however, a trail had been well established—so much so that the prospectors flooding into California came to be called forty-niners. But the journey was a hazardous one.

- An alternative was to travel by sea. Common sea routes from New York, Boston, or Philadelphia involved sailing down the eastern coast of South America, around Cape Horn, and up the Pacific coast to San Francisco. It was an immense trip of 14,700 miles, and included the stormiest and most hostile sea passages in the world. Clipper ships could make the trip in 120 days; ordinary vessels took longer, and the voyage was always unpredictable.

- Travelers could also sail from the East Coast into the Caribbean, travel by land across Central America, and then board another ship on the Pacific side of the continent. The Panama Canal would not be built for

another 60 years, and the danger of tropical fevers made this option as hazardous as all the others. But the savings of time and distance were great: The route was 5,800 miles long, and took only four to six weeks to complete.

- Despite all the difficulties, thousands of Americans made the trip to California. It's vivid testimony to the powerful allure of gold. And Americans weren't the only ones who poured in. Diggers from Europe and Asia also set out for California, becoming a part of the first truly multicultural communities in America. Mexicans, Chinese, English, Irish, and people of many other nationalities all came to stake their claims.

- These communities were anything but harmonious, however. Bitter ethnic and racial prejudices led to battles between the different groups, with the Chinese especially vulnerable to abuse. In many cases, Chinese diggers were excluded from a prospecting area until the whites had abandoned it. Impoverished sites that generated a

very low yield were called "Chinaman's diggings." The only thing the gold-seekers could all agree on was the need to exclude the Indians who had actually lived on these lands for centuries.

TRIAL AND ERROR

- Eager forty-niners soon learned the best places to look for gold. Through a process of trial and error, they discovered that gold was most likely to be found in beds where rivers slowed down as they flowed out of the mountains and on to flatter ground. Within these areas, gold was more likely to be found on the inside of a river bend than the outside. The ideal place to stake a claim, then, was just where the gradient of the river decreased, and on the inside of a bend.

- Those first to arrive were often able to pan for gold. They swirled pans full of sediment around, letting water carry away the lighter minerals until the heavier particles of gold were left behind. A slightly more sophisticated form of gold recovery was the rocker, a box of graduated screens into which river silt was shoveled and across which water was streamed. The denser gold particles would fall through the screens onto a piece of fabric or carpet; the lighter dross would be carried away by the water.

- The more enterprising gold-seekers knew that they wouldn't be able to get at much of the gold unless they could divert the river and dig up its bed. That would require getting a large number of men in the same locality to agree to the project, share the labor of building a diversionary channel and a dam, and share in the rewards. In some cases, this led to experiments in self-government, with ad hoc local governments allocating small areas to each man who was actually digging, and reclaiming land if its owner left the area.

- With so many people pouring into the area eager for quick wealth, it's not surprising that fraud and confidence tricks proliferated. Prospectors had to learn quickly how to distinguish gold from pyrite,


pyrite, also known as fool's gold

commonly known as fool's gold. The simplest way to tell the difference was by biting; pyrite crumbles, but gold yields to the tooth.

- Another area of potential fraud was real estate. Almost at once, a vigorous trade in gold-bearing lands sprang up. Unwary buyers sometimes found themselves paying for land that had been salted—a technique that created the false impression that an exposed rock face contained gold. The unscrupulous seller would fill a few shotgun cartridges with grit and flakes of gold and fire his gun at the rock face. A few days later, he would show an unwary buyer a place where gold could be dug out from just below the surface.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

- It's often true in the history of business that a technology starts out small, but gradually grows in size and sophistication. This process favors those who can invest capital in better techniques and machines. In addition, each new business depends on a steady supply of equipment that the business needs. Such was the progression of commerce in the gold fields of California.

- In 1849 and 1850, a few men really did make fortunes with simple pans and rockers. Wiser heads, however, realized that they might do better selling pans and rockers, as well as shovels, mules, tents, cooking pots, and all the other paraphernalia that miners needed. These men made a profit even if their customers never found a single flake of gold. At the same time, demand for their goods meant they could charge high prices.

- William Brown from Toledo, Ohio, created a business bringing groceries to miners in scattered mountain camps, and even meeting the mail ships in San Francisco and hurrying letters to the homesick diggers. Forty-niners soon discovered that everything in the gold districts was astronomically expensive—up to 10 times more expensive than the same goods and services back East. Dreams of easy fortunes soon evaporated, and most of the miners spent any all they found just to stay alive and keep working.

- It occurred to some of the more entrepreneurial prospectors, as well as those with access to capital, that they could locate gold seams in the mountains and tunnel into the ground for it, rather than simply picking up the flakes carried down by the rivers. It's not as easy as it sounds, however. Digging into hard rock is a difficult, dangerous, and exhausting activity. Tunnels become vulnerable to cave-ins, flooding, and subsidence almost at once. Mining costs a tremendous amount of money, which again favored wealthy capitalists over do-it-yourself individuals with more hope than experience.

LASTING EFFECTS

- The collective effect of the gold rush was to shift entire populations. The population of California swelled so rapidly that just two years after the first discoveries, it applied successfully for statehood, becoming the first noncontiguous state to join the Union. Even those who were unsuccessful as prospectors often stayed, turning to farming, ranching, or mining as wage laborers. California's economy became more durable as a result.

- The California Gold Rush also established a situation that was to be repeated frequently in the following decades. Somewhere in the vast Western expanse, some lonely prospector would make a strike, news would leak out, and thousands of hopeful prospectors would flock to the scene. This was how Denver got its start in 1859. Many other early settlements in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona and Utah were also founded as a direct result of gold and silver rushes.

- Back East, the usual settlement pattern as the frontier advanced was that farms would develop first. Towns would then follow, serving as market centers for the farmers. In the West, the opposite happened. Makeshift towns sprang up first near the gold diggings, and only later would people spread out into the surrounding countryside to farm.

- The psychology of gold rushes is mysterious. Unlike coal and oil, whose recovery played an important role in the later history of the American West, gold is not particularly useful; it's valued more for its decorative and monetary character than for its practical applications. And yet it has exercised a greater fascination on entire peoples than any other mineral.

- There's no question that the California Gold Rush accelerated expansion into the American West. At the time of the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson anticipated that the settlement of the continent would take hundreds of years. Instead, the process went into overdrive. By 1900, the concept of the Western frontier was just a memory.

SUGGESTED READING

Athearn, *High Country Empire*.

Brands, *The Age of Gold*.

Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*.

Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Did the United States as a whole benefit from the California Gold Rush?
2. Why was it so difficult to actually get rich during the gold rush? Who was most likely to make a fortune?

Lecture 12

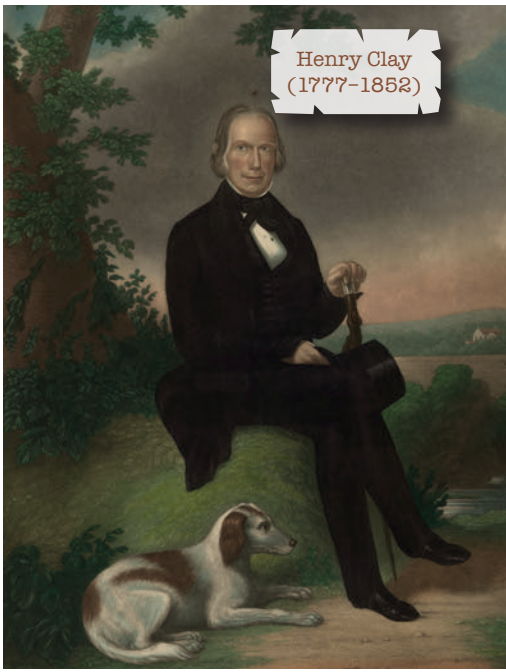
BLEEDING KANSAS AND THE CIVIL WAR IN THE WEST

America's Western frontier is often portrayed as a zone of constant violence and bloodshed, where reckless bandits fought to the death in street duels. While there were certainly violent episodes on occasion, this portrayal is not quite accurate. The most violent period in the American West took place in the 1860s, in Missouri and in Kansas, as divided loyalties brought on by the Civil War led to irregular warfare, bloodshed, and mutual atrocities.

SETTING THE STAGE

- By 1854, the U.S. Constitution had been in continuous operation for 65 years. A success in most respects, it had even been employed to deal with the controversial topic of slavery, about which different people held very different ideas. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 was designed to manage the problem in the rapidly growing nation: New states were always to be admitted to the Union in twos, one using free labor and the other using slave labor. The number of Senators from free and slave states would thus remain in balance.

- The rise of radical abolitionism in the 1830s, and the decision of the British government to abolish slavery throughout its empire in 1833, put new stress on the Missouri Compromise. By 1850, proslavery advocates, trying to overcome the sense that they were about to be swept away by a change in international opinion, had developed an argument to the effect that their system was a positive good, much more benign than industrial free labor. Free-labor advocates rejected this claim with contempt.



- Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, two senior politicians who had safeguarded the Missouri Compromise, both died in 1852, leaving a more polarized political landscape. When settlers in the territories between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains asked Congress for the right to organize themselves into new states, Congress passed

the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Abandoning the balance principle of the Missouri Compromise, the new law authorized new states in the area to decide for themselves whether they would allow slavery within their borders.

- At first glance, this approach sounds like a sensible democratic arrangement. But democracy only works when everyone is dedicated to making it work, and where there is already a broad consensus on the most important issues. Consensus was missing in Kansas. The advocates of both views responded to the law by encouraging temporary immigration to Kansas to create local majorities. Early elections there were dogged by the fraudulent votes of men who crossed the border, sometimes just for the day, in the hope of swinging the outcome.

- In the early 1850s, the settler population of Kansas was still small. The area had originally been set aside as Indian Territory, but constant pressure from squatters and the inability of tiny federal forces to exclude them led to the renegotiation of treaties with many of the tribes. Settlement was clustered in the northeastern portion of the territory, along the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, with nearly all the white population clustered near the state of Missouri.

CONFLICT IN KANSAS

- The slave-owning minority in Missouri were afraid that a free-labor Kansas would tempt their slaves to escape across the border. They feared that a free-labor Kansas would mark the beginning of the end for their whole way of life. Senator David Atchison of Missouri believed that the future of the entire nation depended on the outcome of events there. "We are playing for a mighty stake," he declared. "The game must be played boldly. … If we win we can carry slavery to the Pacific Ocean, if we fail we lose Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and all the territories."

- The Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company, whose members were mostly abolitionists dedicated to a free-labor future for Kansas, helped create the towns of Lawrence, Manhattan, and Topeka. Their settlement goals created even more publicity for the area, further provoking the opposition.

- In May of 1856, Sheriff Samuel Jones, a proslavery advocate, raised a posse of 750 Southern sympathizers to attack Lawrence. These men were known at the time as the Border Ruffians. Jones arrived with a federal marshal, but the two of them soon lost control of their own men, who burned down the local hotel, smashed two printing presses to curtail free-labor propaganda, and killed two settlers. The polarization intensified.

- Two famous Yankees responded to the violence with direct action of their own. The first, Henry Ward Beecher, was already a distinguished minister, and was the son of Lyman Beecher, the most respected Puritan preacher of his time. Henry Ward Beecher's sister, Harriet Beecher-Stowe, was the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the antislavery bestseller of the era. Beecher sent rifles to free-labor settlers in Kansas to help them defend themselves.

- The second of these famous Yankees was John Brown, originally from Connecticut. An antislavery zealot, Brown retaliated for the attack on Lawrence by leading a night raid against proslavery forces in Kansas. He and his four sons killed five proslavery settlers, dragging them out of their cabins and hacking them to death with swords in what became known as the Pottawatomie Massacre. The five victims had not been involved in the conflict, and were regarded by the proslavery faction as innocent martyrs.

- Guerrilla fighting soon broke out in the Kansas-Missouri borderlands, and 200 more men were killed in the ensuing months, including one of John Brown's sons. Raiders from both factions burned crops, seized and tortured settlers, and defied the authorities. Even the arrival of 1,000 federal troops could not end the violence.

- John Brown himself, who rightly foresaw that he would die an early death, went on to seize the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in 1859. It was an attempt to provoke a slave rebellion, but turned into one of the precipitating events of Confederate secession and the Civil War.

- Proslavery and antislavery forces each tried to draft and enforce constitutions for Kansas. Four constitutions were ultimately written, at Topeka, Lecompton, Leavenworth, and Wyandotte, the last of which finally became the actual constitution of the new state. Kansas entered the Union as a free-labor state in 1861, just after the Confederate states had seceded.

- Abolitionists in the East used the idea of "Bleeding Kansas" as a way of promoting the free-soil, antislavery ideology at the heart of the new Republican Party. In recent years, however, several historians have pointed out that, as bloody as the Kansas frontier certainly was, many other areas of the Union were equally subject to riots and bloodshed in the turbulent 1850s.

THE CIVIL WAR

- The Civil War itself was fought mainly in the area between the District of Columbia and Richmond, Virginia, and along the course of the Mississippi River. Other important campaigns took place along the Tennessee River and in Sherman's Georgia campaign, where large armies met on great battlefields. Kansas and Missouri, by contrast, witnessed years of ugly guerrilla fighting.

- Raids and counter-raids soon escalated. A regular Union army commander, Thomas Ewing, recognized early in the war that Confederate guerrillas were attacking Union forces, then dispersing to their farms on the Missouri-Kansas border. He responded by rounding up the families of suspected raiders and destroying their crops, adopting a scorched-earth technique that General Sherman would use three years later during his march through Georgia. The captive families were then placed under guard in Kansas City.

- The most notorious of Missouri's pro-Confederate guerrilla leaders was William Quantrill, a former Ohio schoolteacher who had migrated to the West in the 1850s. Quantrill had failed as a homesteader, worked as a horse-thief and slave-catcher, and eventually adopted a pro-Southern outlook. When the war broke out, he gathered a group of opportunistic fighters to take advantage of the area's lawless condition. In 1862, he captured Independence, Missouri, and was rewarded with a captainship in the Confederate army. He went on to lead bloody raids throughout the state.

- Pro-Union guerrillas were equally ferocious. Unionists with scores to settle could easily claim that their victims were pro-Southern. Thomas Ewing recognized that criminals were giving themselves a veneer of respectability by claiming to fight on behalf of principle rather than just for profit.

- In the long run, Union forces gained the upper hand in both Missouri and Kansas, but only after years of bitter fighting, ambush, torture,

and reprisal. This era of chronic anarchy and warfare on the Kansas-Missouri frontier was matched by scattered fighting all along the Western frontier, in most cases merely incidental to the Civil War.

- In the far West, beyond the line of white settlement, Union and Confederate forces fought a few isolated engagements. The numbers of men involved were tiny by comparison with the great armies fighting at Manassas, Gettysburg, Shiloh, and Antietam.

- In retrospect, it is clear that slave-owners' hopes for the West were doomed to disappointment. Beyond the eastern portion of Texas, nearly all of the landscape was just too dry for effective plantation agriculture. Even small-scale farmers were destined to struggle there in future decades. The desert lands of New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California would remain almost uninhabited until the development of large-scale irrigation and water management in the mid-20th century.

- The remaining issue in the Southwest during the Civil War, from the Union's point of view, was aggressive raiding by bands of Native Americans in the desert areas. Navajos, Utes, Zunis and Apaches had launched frequent raids when these lands were parts of Mexico, often


Canyon de Chelley

destroying settlements and either killing or enslaving their inhabitants. When the area became part of the United States, the federal government had tried to make treaties but was unable to back them up with sufficient force.

- A senior Union officer, Brigadier-General James Carleton, gave command of 400 New Mexico volunteers to the famous mountain man Kit Carson. Carson advanced, attacking Canyon de Chelley at the heart of traditional Navajo lands. Attacking in midwinter when the Navajo were ill-prepared to resist, Carson offered them the harsh alternatives of starvation or surrender. While a handful continued to resist, the majority surrendered, having come to believe that continued war against the Americans would lead only to further hardship and eventual defeat.

- The Union victory in the Civil War and the abolition of slavery in 1865 transformed the United States. These two momentous achievements, along with the undeniably harsh suppression of Indian resistance, cleared the way for an accelerated advance into the far West.

SUGGESTED READING

Castel, *Civil War Kansas*.

Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*.

McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*.

Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why was the early history of Kansas so dangerous and volatile?
2. Did the Civil War impede or advance settlement of the American West?

Lecture 13

BUILDING THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROADS

To Americans of the mid-19th century, steam locomotion was a technological miracle. An overland journey from New York to California in the 1840s might take three or four months; a comparable journey 30 years later could be completed, in relative comfort, in less than a week. Long-distance trains accelerated Western settlement, and linked the vast spaces of the American West to the Eastern civilization from which it had developed.

PLANNING STAGES

- Steam locomotive technology was worked out in the late 1820s and early 1830s in England. It was very quickly imported into America, and gained in speed, sophistication, and safety in each ensuing decade.

- Railroad building, especially in the Northeast, flourished in the 25 years before the Civil War. One reason the Union won the war was because of its dense railroad network that could move large numbers of men, horses, weapons, and bulky supplies quickly to the places where they were needed most.

- The possibility of a transcontinental railroad had been discussed even before the war, in the 1850s. The planned railroad would link the remote settlements of California and Oregon to the rest of the nation, and provide a lifeline for the growing number of settlers moving beyond the Mississippi valley.

- A railroad across the entire continent would require more capital than had ever been invested in a single commercial project. It would almost certainly need government funding. But sectional tensions in Congress between North and South were acute in the 1850s, with each side insisting on a route through its own territory.

- Once the Confederate states seceded, it was a simple matter for the Northern-dominated Congress to pass legislation in favor of a northern route. It would start near Omaha, Nebraska, the most westerly point reached by earlier rail ventures, and would end at Sacramento, California.

- Two companies were formed. One, the Union Pacific, would push west across the plains. The other, the Central Pacific, would head east from Sacramento. An agreed-upon survey of the entire route ensured that the two lines would eventually meet, completing the East-West link somewhere in the desert and mountain states.

THE CONSTRUCTION

- Major construction work began in 1863 at the Sacramento end and after the Civil War ended at the Omaha end. The Union Pacific's labor force was made up largely of Union army veterans and recent Irish immigrants. Nearly all the work had to be done by hand. By 1867, the Union Pacific had approximately 2,000 men on the job, and often managed to lay track at a rate of two miles per day.

- A moving settlement—called, simply, End of Track—inched its way across the plains along with the work. Letters to men working there would be addressed to, for example, "Billy Reilly, Union Pacific Railroad, End of Track." End of Track was supplied by trains moving back and forth along the lengthening lines, carrying rails, ties, tools, and everything else necessary to sustain the work.

- End of Track was a combination of tents and freight cars converted into dormitories. Payday often witnessed high-stakes gambling, bouts of drunkenness, and a vigorous business for the prostitutes who

accompanied the moving settlement. Work continued throughout the blazing summers. In winter, when the ground was frozen and covered in snow, the work would stop.

- Progress in the opposite direction, from Sacramento, was slower. The Central Pacific had more difficult terrain to cross, including the Sierra Nevada. The carefully graded track wound through the foothills on a gradual ascent, along high embankments, through deep cuttings, and over immense trestle bridges across valleys. Near the summit it entered a series of tunnels.

- Building the summit tunnels was the single greatest challenge of the entire project. For months and years workers hammered away at the hard rock, chiseling out patterns of holes, filling them with gunpowder, lighting the fuses, retiring to a safe distance for the moment of explosion, then returning to shovel out the rock debris. A newly developed liquid explosive, nitroglycerine, provided additional blasting power and sped up the work, but also led to horrifying accidents that killed several workers. The tunnels took more than a year to complete.

- Most of the Central Pacific's workers were Chinese immigrants—approximately 12,000 of the 15,000 men. They built a reputation for hard work, and were willing to accept lower pay than most white Americans. They also ate a healthier diet, including seafood and vegetables, and drank tea instead of whiskey.

- The most dramatic work undertaken by the Chinese gangs was building the track bed across a steep mountain slope on the North Fork of the American River. In places, a shelf for the track had to be blasted into an almost vertical cliff face. Lowered from the mountaintop in reed baskets, daring workmen chipped out holes, filled them with blasting powder, lit the fuses, then signaled to their partners to haul them up.

- Tunnel work continued throughout the long winters. Villages almost buried in the snow housed the workmen, who carried on working

in temperatures far below freezing. It was a harsh and pitiless work environment, and the mortality rate was high. Avalanches sometimes swept away entire crews.

- While the tunnels and cliffside sections were being completed, the Central Pacific continued its work beyond the mountains, in Nevada. The great problem there was extreme aridity. Steam locomotives work by converting water into steam at high pressure, so creating a trackside water supply was essential. Streams flowing from the Sierra Nevada were diverted along flumes leading to water tanks, sometimes for many miles.

- With the passage of time, the workforces at both ends of the project became more efficient. A crew working parallel to the railroad itself set up telegraph poles and wire, allowing those at the end of the track to communicate with headquarters back in Sacramento.

- In May of 1869, the two lines met at Promontory Point, Utah. Dignitaries arrived from both ends of the line, made long speeches, and proposed toasts. The place is now commemorated by a historical marker and a small national park.

RAPID GROWTH

- The building of the first transcontinental railway is one of the great stories of American technological achievement, but it's also one of the most shameful stories of American financial skullduggery. To get the rights to the project in the first place, the two great companies spent heavily on bribes. They continued to use bribery as a way of ensuring favorable resolution of the political controversies that arose around their work.

- Once the line had been completed, running it required the continued work of thousands of men. In hot, dry summers, everything wooden was in danger of catching fire from the sparks that poured out of the locomotives' chimneys. Sparks could also set fire to prairie grasses, causing wildfires. Winter was even more of a problem, especially in the mountains and High Plains, where cuttings would fill up with snow and freeze solid.

- Settlement followed the railway. Although it was possible to stake a claim on the public domain, and to acquire a 160-acre farm nearly free of charge under the terms of the Homestead Act, many aspiring farmers preferred to buy land from the railroad companies. Owning land near the track meant that these farmers would be well placed to ship their crops at harvest time, and to import goods with the proceeds of these sales.

- Towns also grew up along the line of the railroads. The biggest buildings in these towns were not their church steeples, but their grain elevators. At harvest time, the produce of hundreds of farms in the surrounding districts would be gathered, sold, and shipped to the great grain exchanges back East.

- The success of the first transcontinental railroad soon encouraged imitators. By the 1890s, four more major routes had been completed: the Southern Pacific, the Santa Fe, the Northern Pacific, and the Great Northern. Each faced daunting technical challenges, but each could draw on a growing fund of experience established by the pioneers.

At the same time, a series of shorter lines running from north to south began to link up the transcontinental lines, creating a dense network of rail connections all across the nation.

LASTING EFFECTS

- It would be hard to overstate the impact of the railroads on the rate of advance of the frontier. When Brigham Young led the Mormons to Salt Lake City in the late 1840s, he thought his people were moving to a place so remote that generations would pass before the frontier caught up with them. In fact, scarcely 20 years had passed before the railroad was passing just to the north of his Zion, making it infinitely less remote than it had seemed.

- Few Americans were opposed to railroads. Only a handful, like Henry David Thoreau, deplored the acceleration of life that they represented. Tens of thousands more enthused over the new mobility the nation had achieved.

- The railroads proved to be a mixed blessing, however. Once settlements had been established throughout the West, the railroad companies were able to dictate terms to the new communities that relied on them. In the 1880s and 1890s, railroad companies became steadily less popular, and were accused of abusing the monopoly situation they enjoyed in most localities. Farmers, in particular, felt aggrieved by how much of their profits went into paying carriage costs to the railroads.

- Congress eventually responded, passing the Interstate Commerce Act in 1887. The Interstate Commerce Commission—the nation's first regulatory agency—was created to regulate the rates charged by railroads operating across state lines.

- Railroad technology improved steadily with the passage of the decades. George Westinghouse's invention of air brakes in 1868 marked a great improvement in safety. Air brakes were installed on every car, all of them linked to the locomotive and operating at the same time. Trains could now be made much longer, as there was no danger of a heavy train simply pushing a locomotive with locked wheels down the track ahead of it.

- The history of American tourism coincides very closely with the history of railroads. Until 1869, it was virtually impossible for any but the very richest Americans to travel for pleasure. Even for them, long-distance stagecoach rides tended to be uncomfortable. Long-distance trains, which competed for passengers, began to add sleeping and restaurant cars, and to advertise the sights one could see along particular routes.

- The ability of the railroads to support large farming communities spelled the end of the nomadic Plains Indians. The old warrior tribes—Sioux, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Arapaho, and many others—were confined to reservations and no longer posed a threat to white settlers. The buffalo on which the Plains Indians had relied were gone, hunted nearly to extinction in the 1870s.

SUGGESTED READING

Ambrose, *Nothing Like It In the World*.

Bain, *Empire Express*.

White, *Railroaded*.

Wolmar, *The Great Railroad Revolution*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Was the federal government justified in subsidizing the construction of a transcontinental railroad?
2. How did railroads transform the economic history of the American West and create a nationwide market?

Lecture 14

COWBOYS AND CATTLE DRIVES

Few symbols better personify the ideal American character than the cowboy. So familiar are the images of cowboys and American Indians on horseback, it's difficult to remember that when Columbus arrived, there were no horses and no cattle in the Americas. Brought by the Spanish as mounts, draft animals, and sources of food, horses and cattle thrived, and would come to play an integral part in the history and development of the American West.

EARLY DRIVES

- The practice of driving herds was already familiar on a smaller scale before the Civil War. Texas longhorns had been driven to New Orleans, St. Louis, and other towns in Missouri since the 1830s. But the commercial scale of the business ramped up after 1865, and the railroads made long-distance shipment possible for the first time. A group of enterprising men recognized the potential source of wealth that cattle represented.

- The key man in the operation was Joseph McCoy, an Illinois stockman. In 1867, the Kansas Pacific railroad was being built across the plains and had already reached Abilene, Kansas. McCoy approached several Texas cattle bosses and told them he was building stockyards in Abilene. If they could get herds of cattle to the town, he would buy them, pen them, and arrange to ship them by rail to the slaughterhouses in Kansas City or Chicago. It was an enticing offer, and many of the Texans agreed. Thirty-five thousand cattle made it to Abilene that summer.

- Because the animals were wild, only skilled men would be able to capture them and drive them up to Kansas. These were the cowboys, able to stay in the saddle for 12 or 15 hours at a stretch, quick with a lasso, and familiar with the temperaments of different animals.

- A routine for the cattle business quickly developed. When spring came, the roundup began. Cowboys hired by trail bosses would seek out animals on the open plains and herd them into makeshift pens to be roped and branded. When a herd had been assembled, the trail boss's principal job was to lead it north to Kansas while keeping the cattle as plump and healthy as possible. They traveled at a slow, steady walk, averaging between 10 and 15 miles per day.

- The route chosen was important. The animals needed access to water every day and, ideally, fertile areas where they could graze every night. The trail could not cross land that had been fenced, and had

to avoid broken or mountainous terrain as much as possible. The early years saw a good deal of trial and error. By 1869, however, a set of well-established trails were in operation.

- The heyday of Abilene was brief. Although McCoy's business model proved successful, it soon clashed with other interests. The farming frontier was moving westward along with the railroad, and the last thing homesteading farmers wanted was great herds of longhorns tramping across their fields. Cattle drives depended on open plains and no fences. Farmers, who often had a few animals of their own, also feared that the longhorns would bring cattle diseases to their animals.

- As a result, the route of the cattle drives began to move westward, staying ahead of the farming frontier. After Abilene, towns like Newton, Wichita, and Dodge City took turns as the end of the trail before settling down to become farming communities. The end of the long cattle drives was inevitable: The supply of wild cattle was not infinite, and the extension of rail lines into Texas made long drives unnecessary.

- Adverse market conditions also caused trouble. In 1873, a severe recession reduced demand for cattle. Prices fell, and many trail

bosses went bankrupt. Business revived in the late 1870s, and a second boom era developed. Cities like Denver, Miles City, and Ogallala took advantage of the maturing railroad network and built stockyards of their own.

COWBOY LIFE

- A dozen well-trained cowboys could guide a herd of between 2,000 and 3,000 cattle. If an animal broke away along the trail, the cowboy's job was to run it down and guide it back into the herd as quickly as possible. Every cowboy needed a string of four or five horses because of the exhausting demands of the work.

- Early outfits often faced Indian attacks. More often, however, the Indians would accept 10 cents per animal in exchange for the right to cross their land. Early outfits also faced the possibility of stampedes, during which hundreds of out-of-control cattle could trample men to death. And when the cows finally did calm down, they were often widely dispersed and took a long time to reassemble.

- Cowboys had a reputation as wild and lawless men. Most Americans—those not actually involved in the business—saw cowboys only at the end of a drive, when they were suddenly flush with money and had the chance to drink heavily. But the reality of life on the trail was very different, requiring an extraordinary blend of patience, skill, endurance, and strength.

- Although you wouldn't know it from most Westerns, the cowboy life drew many freedmen after slavery ended in the United States. And as the scale of cattle ranching increased, a growing number of Hispanic and Mexican men were hired—usually at very low wages—to do most of the hard work; owners had discovered by then that white cowboys were rowdier and more likely to demand better pay and better working conditions.

- In the late 1870s and early 1880s, a different form of cowboy life arose on the High Plains and in the mountain states, where rainfall was too low for ordinary farming. Wyoming and Montana, before they became states and in their first years of statehood, were cattle ranch country. They had previously been buffalo country, but hunters with high-powered rifles had come close to annihilating the species in the early 1870s.

UPS AND DOWNS

- With highly capitalized companies investing tens of millions of dollars, the cattle industry began to follow the same pattern as oil, iron, steel, textiles, and the other enterprises that were turning the United States into the world's capitalist leader. But the good times of the early 1880s soon came to a grinding halt.

- By 1886, too many ranches were running cattle on the open range, degrading the grasses on which the business depended. The summer of 1886 was extremely hot and dry, making pasture poorer than usual. Then came an extremely harsh winter, with deep snowdrifts killing off huge numbers of cattle. A wave of bankruptcies swept the industry.

- Those who had survived the disastrous winter began to switch to intensive methods of cattle-raising—taking greater care of the animals, preparing winter fodder, and limiting their mobility. In addition, the invention of barbed wire meant that it was now possible to fence the land. A better understanding of the relationship between the animals and the environment enabled the area to enter the 20th century with a cattle industry more dependable than before.

- Among the many threats to cattlemen's well-being was the arrival of sheepherders in the 1870s and 1880s. These sheepmen often competed for grazing rights on public land. Sheep graze more intensively than cattle, which means that the grass takes longer to regrow. In Texas, Colorado, and Wyoming, sheepmen sometimes cut cattlemen's

fences. Cattlemen might retaliate by killing the sheep—and sometimes their owners as well.

- Cowboys had plenty of work to do even after 1890. So long as cattle were ranging across ranchland most of the year, cowboys would be needed to round them up each spring. Winter foddering, checking fence lines, branding, neutering, and watching out for cattle diseases became routine jobs for the modern cowboy. Horses remained essential for roundups in mountain and canyon country, and are still used for those purposes to this day.

SUGGESTED READING

Rollins, *The Cowboy*.

Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*.

Siringo, *A Texas Cowboy*.

White, "Animals and Enterprise."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Were real cowboys comparable to movie cowboys? If not, what were the major differences?
2. Why was the era of Texas cattle drives so brief, and why did the heart of ranching country move to the High Plains in the 1880s?

Lecture 15

HOMESTEADERS ON THE PLAINS

At the time of the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson envisioned a nation of yeoman farmers—sturdy, independent men tilling the soil and gathering in small communities for education, worship, and sociability. For more than a century, in hundreds of communities across the country, Jefferson's vision came close to fulfillment. Farming remained the single commonest occupation throughout 19th century.

DIVIDING THE LAND

- The Land Ordinance of 1785 established the method by which Western land was surveyed and divided. Townships were established, each 36 square miles in area. The 36-square-mile sections were further divided into quarter-sections, each 160 acres in area. This figure became the benchmark for a family farm.

- East of the Mississippi—and for some distance west of it, too—a 160-acre farm was indeed enough to feed a family and enable it to prosper. States like Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois were largely sold in lots of 160 acres, and were settled by families who moved west between the 1780s and the 1850s.

- In 1862, Congress passed the Homestead Act, which decreed that the lands of the public domain would be made available for settlement by anyone willing to move there and farm it. Individuals and their families were entitled to 160 acres apiece, and they would own the land outright after five years of improvement.

- The result of the Homestead Act was a steady migration onto the plains after the Civil War, along with a great increase in the numbers of individual landholders and farms—laid out on the plains in a seemingly endless grid—and a steady increase in the American food supply.

- Settlers from all over Europe, eager to own land of their own, also responded to the opportunity presented by the Homestead Act. For immigrants, it was enough to declare their intention to become U.S. citizens; they did not need to be citizens already to be eligible for the land.

LIFE ON THE PRAIRIE

- Early plains visitors had assumed that the land could not be occupied or farmed, and could support no more than a handful of nomadic

tribesmen. It was a reasonable assumption. The area lacked wood, which meant there was no building material and no fuel for fires.

- Ingenious settlers in the 1860s and 1870s worked out how to live without wood for building and fire. The plains were covered with hundreds of millions of buffalo chips, the desiccated remains of buffalo dung, which early settlers used to make fire. Many settlers built sod houses out of the prairie grasses on which they trod. In hillier terrain, dugouts—homes dug into the hillside—were an alternative to sod houses.

- The density of prairie vegetation meant that only hard iron or steel plows, of a type then being produced by John Deere and others, could cut it. Settlers described the sonorous note produced as their teams of oxen or horses strained and the plow blade first broke the ground. It was an exhilarating novelty to arrive on previously unfarmed land, plow it straightaway, and gather an abundant harvest in the very first year.

- An obvious limitation of the Homestead Act's grid system was that some 160-acre parcels were more desirable than others. Land among river valleys, washed by centuries of alluvial flooding, was sure to be

Many settlers built sod houses out of the prairie grasses on which they trod.

more fertile than high ground. Patterns of settlement followed the valleys closely, with higher land falling to later arrivals.

- In western areas of the plains, rainfall was too low to sustain ordinary farming over a long period of time. In the 1880s, farmers in western Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska, and in eastern Wyoming and Colorado, found that they had come too far. The late 1880s and early 1890s saw a succession of farm bankruptcies.

- Homestead farmers often specialized in a single crop, typically corn or wheat. They would sell their crop on the market and use the proceeds to buy everything else they needed. It was common for families to live for a year or two in a sod house, then use the profits of their farm to import wood to build a proper house. They would also buy tools, as well as the various household goods associated with respectability.

- Memoirs of growing up in the area emphasize the high moral tone, the centrality of churchgoing, and the intense educational expectations placed on the communities' children. Very often the first wooden building in a township would be a schoolhouse, which might double as church or community center until other specialized buildings could be constructed.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

- The sudden rise in agricultural development on the plains was bound to have ecological effects. One notable effect was a sudden rise in insect infestations. Growing just one crop, such as wheat, created a perfect environment for insects who fed on that crop. A famous example is the locust plague that recurred every summer from 1874 to 1877. Billions of locusts swarmed across the plains, eating everything in their path; entire crops were destroyed overnight.

- Homesteading was a great democratic experiment. It offered more or less the same terms to everyone, then watched to see who could

succeed. After the first few years, farm sizes began to increase as discouraged homesteaders gave up and sold their land to their more successful or more determined neighbors.

- Agricultural technology improved rapidly. John Deere steel plows were available, as were McCormick reapers, which were predecessors of the combined harvester. Steam-powered traction engines appeared in the 1880s, and mobile, steam-powered threshers moved across the land during the harvest season. Agricultural machines worked well on the wide-open fields of the plains, and helped compensate for the scarcity of available wage laborers.

- The cumulative effect of these changes was an increase of food, both in the American market and in the world market beyond. With the exception of the extreme political conditions during the two world wars, there have been no famines in Western Europe or America since the opening up of the Great Plains.

- The chronic problem of agriculture throughout most of world history has been the threat of harvest failure, famine, and starvation. By contrast, the chronic problem of Western agriculture from the 1880s to the present has been overproduction—as the supply goes up, the price comes down. Western farmers, after enjoying healthy profits in their early years of homesteading, witnessed a gradual but relentless decline in the profitability of their farms.

- To make matters worse, the period from the 1870s through the 1890s was marked by economic deflation, in which the amount of money in circulation can't keep pace with the rise in economic activity and the rise in population. Deflation is fine for creditors, but it's bad for debtors, because the real value of the money they owe keeps rising.

- Plains farmers found themselves in a baffling and often infuriating situation. They had taken the risks to establish their farms, but the benefits of their hard work were going elsewhere. Food supplies were more plentiful and less costly than ever before—good news for consumers

in industrial cities, but bad news for farmers. Banks, meanwhile, were profiting from the repayment of farm loans, and railroad companies began raising their rates.

- As the 20th century dawned, farmers in the American West were coming to terms with the fact that they no longer represented the vanguard of the nation's efforts. In 1870, a young man pioneering a homestead farm would have been encouraged to think of himself as an instrument of civilization and progress. By 1900, however, he would have been battered by forces far beyond his control.

- While perhaps unappreciated by the beneficiaries of their labor, the farmers of the American West nevertheless had a permanent effect on the world's food supply. The nation continues to benefit from the extraordinary plenty created by the homesteaders of the late 19th century, and their stories are inseparable from those of many Western states.

SUGGESTED READING

Danbom, *Sod Busting*.

Rolvaag, *Giants in the Earth*.

Stratton, *Pioneer Women*.

Webb, *The Great Plains*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How is our understanding of the agricultural settlement of the Great Plains improved when we consider evidence from women as well as men, and when we think about long-term economic trends?
2. How did advances in technology and transportation facilitate the agricultural settlement of the Great Plains?

Lecture 16

LITTLE BIGHORN AND WOUNDED KNEE

Large numbers of white settlers migrated to the Great Plains following the end of the Civil War, a development that spelled the doom of the Plains Indian tribes and their nomadic way of life. Several forces conspired against Plains Indians, including the destruction of the great bison herds, the permanent occupation of the land by homesteading farmers, and the implacable hostility of nearly all white settlers.

MUTUAL ATROCITIES

- Centuries of mistrust and fear between whites and Indians led to extraordinary levels of brutality on both sides. During the Civil War, for example, when the army was unable to protect frontier settlements, a Santee Sioux uprising in Minnesota killed more than 400 settlers. The government retaliated by hanging 38 men in public, the largest mass execution in American history.

- Local militias throughout the West often took affairs into their own hands. The Sand Creek Massacre of November 1864 was one such event. John Chivington, leader of a Colorado militia, led a raid against a Cheyenne camp on the banks of Sand Creek. Chivington and his men rode through the camp killing men, women, and children, and scalping the corpses. More than 200 of the 700 inhabitants were killed.

- The Sand Creek Massacre killed many of the Plains Indian leaders who sought a peaceful resolution to the growing conflict and created a legacy of bitterness and distrust. In 1866, a group of Sioux warriors lured a troop of American soldiers into an ambush outside Fort Phil Kearny in northern Wyoming. The Sioux surrounded and captured the soldiers, killed all 81 of them with arrows, knives, and gunshots, and mutilated the bodies.

- It is easy enough for us to deplore the mutual atrocities committed during this period, and to condemn the whites for their harsh racist attitude. At the time, however, many whites were convinced that they represented civilization and that the Indians represented savagery. The Indians should adapt, they thought, to an obviously superior way of life. They should abandon nomadism, settle down on farms, and assimilate. Or else they should be exterminated.

- In the late 1860s and early 1870s, army officers and politicians realized that the surest way to pacify the plains and open them up to white settlement would be to remove the buffalo. Without the immense

herds of American bison on which the Indians' subsistence depended, the tribes would be obliged to seek an alternative source of food.

- Ironically, Indian hunters were already deeply involved in the process of destroying the resource on which their people's way of life depended. Contracted primarily to buffalo robe companies, they had been killing the buffalo in growing numbers since the 1840s. The use of rifles made their hunts more lethal than in the bow-and-arrow days.

- In the early 1870s, the appearance of white buffalo hunters with high-powered, long-distance rifles greatly accelerated the killing. Sure-handed riflemen could kill the animals from several hundred yards away. The deadliest of the hunters could kill dozens of animals in a single day. By the early 1880s, the buffalo were on the brink of extinction.

CUSTER'S LAST STAND

- The political situation was heavily stacked against the Indians. Army units were sometimes designated to keep out white settlers from

Indian reservations, but their own sympathies were so strongly with the settlers, and against the Indians, that they did a poor job of it. Already a long legacy of broken treaties marred Indian-white relations, and events of the early 1870s poisoned them further.

- In 1874, George Armstrong Custer, a daredevil cavalryman and Civil War hero, led a survey of the Black Hills in Dakota Territory—part of an area guaranteed to the Sioux by an 1868 treaty. Custer's expedition discovered gold, word of the discovery leaked out, and prospectors soon poured into the area.

- This development led to the gathering in 1876 of a large and powerful force of Sioux and Cheyenne, who were angry about steady encroachments onto their traditional hunting lands. The tribes were traditional enemies, and had long had difficulty joining forces against the Americans. This time, however, they formed an effective fighting force.

- Among the leaders of the Indian force were Crazy Horse, an Oglala Sioux warrior in his mid-thirties, and Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa Sioux who reported a great vision "of soldiers falling into his camp like grasshoppers from the sky." Sitting Bull understood this vision to be an omen of coming victory.

- The appearance of this unusually large Indian force provoked a large-scale response from the army. The army was aided by scouts from the Crow and Pawnee, tribes with a long history of antagonism to the Sioux and Cheyenne.

- Custer, leading a column of the Seventh Cavalry, encountered the Indian force on June 26, 1876, in what is now eastern Montana. Without reconnoitering to discover the Indians' full strength, Custer attacked. He believed that his men would face less than 1,000 enemies; the actual number was likely more than 2,000. His column of 200 men was annihilated. This was the Battle of the Little Bighorn, also known as Custer's Last Stand.

- Soon afterward, the victorious Indians were forced to scatter; so many horses in one place had grazed off all the available grass, and new pastures were essential. Their force was never able to reassemble—many of the warriors had slipped away from reservations in the area and now went back, anticipating retribution if they remained.

- News of Custer's death reached the East a few days later. President Grant responded by sending a larger force into the West to hunt down the perpetrators. Its leader was General Ranald Mackenzie. In the months that followed, Mackenzie turned his superior resources to good effect.

- Indian wars had usually been confined to the warm months. General Mackenzie turned this tradition to his advantage, sending his columns into the mountain valleys where the Indians' winter camps lay. Forcing the braves into action, he would then seize or burn their tipis, exposing entire communities to a winter without food or shelter.

- It was a brutally effective method, and the consequences were inevitable. By the spring of 1877, less than a year after the Little Bighorn, effective resistance had ended. Crazy Horse turned himself in at the Red Cloud Indian agency in May of that year. He was bayonetted to death a few months later, possibly while trying to escape. Sitting Bull went into exile in Canada. Angry politicians now forced the Sioux to relinquish the Black Hills permanently.

WOUNDED KNEE

- Nomadic peoples confined to reservations found the life almost unendurable. Men with multiple wives, a common situation, were ordered to send away all but one, and were offered heavy-handed incentives to become Christians. They were forced to rely on handouts from the government now that the buffalo had been almost annihilated.

- Corruption among the Indian agents meant that Indians often received inferior or spoiled food, and sometimes far fewer supplies than they had been promised. Many whites sympathized with the Indians' plight, and warned Washington that trouble would follow if the government failed to fulfill its treaty obligations.

- In the 1880s, a new religious movement sprang up among reservations across the American West: the Ghost Dance. It began with a Paiute visionary, Wovoka, whose father had died when he was young, and who had lived for a time with a white family. Wovoka learned in a vision that Jesus Christ would return to Earth as a Native American.

- Wovoka's vision foretold the destruction of the world, and a rebirth for those who had converted to the new faith. There would be peace in the new world, plentiful buffalo, and no white men. Even the ancestors would return, Wovoka claimed, so long as devotees danced the Ghost Dance to bring them back.


Sitting Bull
(c. 1831–1890)

- One of the places where this new faith caught on was Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Reservation, not far from the Little Bighorn. Among those present at Wounded Knee was the old chief Sitting Bull.

- When the Ghost Dance began at Pine Ridge, a worried Indian agent sounded the alarm. Members of the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old regiment, were

ordered to arrest Sitting Bull. They were then to disarm the dancers, some of whom were convinced that the special shirts they wore made them invulnerable to bullets.

- A scuffle broke out as Sitting Bull's friends tried to protect him from arrest. The soldiers opened fire, and Sitting Bull and several onlookers were killed. Two weeks later, more fighting broke out between the soldiers and the men they had been told to disarm. A virtual massacre followed, with at least 150 and possibly as many as 300 Native Americans killed, along with about 25 of the soldiers. The full death toll has always been contested.

SUGGESTED READING

Calloway, *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*.

Carlson, *The Plains Indians*.

Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*.

Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is it better to use current moral preconceptions when studying the history of the Plains Indians, or to put them aside for the sake of understanding the context in which the Plains Indians lived?
2. What factors eventually made American victory over the Plains Indians inevitable, and why were the decisive years those that immediately followed the Civil War?

Lecture 17

LIFE IN WESTERN TOWNS AND CITIES

Several types of cities developed in the American West. The oldest were Spanish towns—El Paso, Tucson, Santa Fe. Other cities developed near discoveries of gold or silver. Towns based on agriculture came later, and were often established close to the railroad, which provided a lifeline for nearby settlers. Then there were the cities of the Pacific coast—San Francisco, San Diego, Portland, Seattle—which were sited near safe harbors for ocean trade.

EARLY GROWTH

- American cities often began life as fortresses. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was originally Fort Duquesne, then became Fort Pitt. Laramie, Wyoming, was originally Fort Sanders. Oasis towns, gold-rush towns, and farming towns also doubled as defensive centers in the volatile years of the early and mid-19th century.

- Towns built around gold and silver rushes were inherently unstable. Denver, for example, was a town of only a few dozen people in 1858. When gold was found, the city's population grew to 7,000 in less than a year. When the rush subsided, Denver transformed itself into a supply center for mining communities throughout the Rockies, and later as a railroad hub.

- Other mineral towns were not as fortunate as Denver. These towns would balloon in population, then shrink to nothing when there was no more gold or silver to be had. They became ghost towns.

- Cities established as communication centers competed for dominance throughout the century. St. Louis, founded in 1764 at the confluence of the Missouri and the Mississippi Rivers, enjoyed nearly a century of preeminence. Following the Missouri upstream, another cluster of towns developed along what is now the Kansas border, including St. Joseph, Leavenworth, Atchison, and Independence.

- These cities were later upstaged by Omaha, which was located a little farther up the Missouri River at its confluence with the Platte River. In 1863, Omaha was selected as the starting point for the Union Pacific Railroad. Kansas City, the site of the first railroad bridge over the Missouri, was another local victor.

- When news came that a railroad was being projected across one of the western states, local boosters competed to ensure that the line would come through their town. To be included on the route spelled prosperity; bypass foretold decline. Albuquerque, for example, surpassed Santa Fe

as the dominant city in New Mexico because of its location along the route of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad.

- The city of Los Angeles paid what was, in effect, a bribe of $600,000 to make sure that the Southern Pacific came to town rather than pass by on the other side of the mountains. They paid another handsome fee to ensure that the Santa Fe Railroad would establish its West Coast terminal there. These payments proved to be superb investments, triggering the immense growth of Los Angeles in the 20th century.

- As railroads moved across the Great Plains through farming country, towns were typically established at regular intervals. The aim was to space these new towns such that no farmer would be more than a day's ride away by wagon. Some railroads merely followed the alphabet as they selected names. The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, for example, sequentially founded Crete, Dorchester, Exeter, Fairmount, Grafton, Hastings, Ingleside, and Juniata as it built a new line across Nebraska.

CITY LIFE

- Railroad towns became local trade centers. The general store was usually the first business to be built, and would be sited near the railroad depot. Other early businesses were the livery stable and the blacksmith's workshop, which were as ubiquitous in horse-based communities as gas stations and garages are today. Banks came next. If all went well, workshops and factories would follow.

- Western towns also became centers of education. The Land Ordinance of 1785 had specified one section in each township should be set aside for a school, and this principle was continued in the Homestead Act. The little red schoolhouse became one of the distinctive buildings in every little town, usually supervised by a schoolmarm from the East who represented the coming of civilization to the raw frontier.

- Architecturally, Western towns were rarely impressive. Built strictly for utility, they were usually platted on a rectangular grid system. Buildings were generally low, wooden structures, sometimes sporting decorative false fronts. Banks were occasionally built of stone or brick, but there were few regional varieties in design. Even larger buildings, such as schools, churches, and factories, were made as copies of buildings back East.

- Western towns also became centers of religious life. In the early days, all the Protestants in a plains neighborhood would generally agree to shelve their denominational differences and worship together in the schoolhouse until separate churches could be built. If the town had been founded by ethnic immigrants, a Catholic, Russian Orthodox, or Lutheran church might be built as new community's ritual center.

- The most dramatic example of religion as the motive for development was Salt Lake City, which was founded as a haven for persecuted Mormons. After the 1844 lynching of Joseph Smith, his successor, Brigham

Young, sought a place so remote and inhospitable that, as Young then believed, generations might pass without further persecution.

- The Mormons' early years in Salt Lake City were marked by drought, flooding, and insect plagues. The settlement persisted, however, and was one of few Western cities to benefit from coherent planning, rather than ad hoc, decentralized growth.

- Saloons were a universal part of urban culture in the century before Prohibition. Hays, Kansas, for example, was founded in 1867 at the western terminus of the Kansas Pacific Railroad; by 1870, the city was home to 75 saloons.

- This was the world in which the militant prohibitionist Carry Nation set to work. At first, Nation prayed outside saloons to shame drinkers from entering the establishment. When that didn't work, she began smashing up saloons with an axe. She was an outstanding publicist for the temperance movement.

- Western towns also became centers of government. Sheriffs, judges, and lawyers regulated urban life and kept the peace, sometimes aided by posses of armed citizens. Among the relatively few federal officials was the postmaster or postmistress, and the post office became a sign of a thriving town. The other federal presence was the land office, where prospective farmers would go to register their claims.

POPULATION CENTERS

- Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, western cities competed with each other for settlers, hoping to outstrip their rivals in growth. A selling point for many, especially in the arid Southwest, was their healthfulness. The cities of El Paso, Phoenix, and Los Angeles promoted themselves as healthy alternatives to the humid East, emphasizing the benefits of the Southwest's clean, warm, dry air.

- The hundreds of towns and small cities scattered across the plains and mountain states of the American West all looked enviously to the few cities that achieved real greatness. None could rival Chicago, which displaced St. Louis as the great central metropolis when railroads replaced rivers.

- On the West Coast, the greatest 19th-century city was San Francisco. It began life as a Spanish colonial village and made its first great fortune as the entry port to the California Gold Rush. In the following decades, San Francisco turned itself into a shipping center, a manufacturing city, a railroad terminus, and a financial hub.

- San Francisco's deepwater harbor, which was well protected from the open sea, was a natural advantage in the city's development. San Francisco also benefited from a mild climate and good inland communications. The city faced many challenges, however, including overcrowding, frequent fires, ethnic tension and conflict, and a strong movement toward unionization.

- In 1906, the city faced its most formidable challenge to date in the form of a devastating earthquake. The earthquake destroyed 80 percent of the city's buildings, and sheared gas lines quickly ignited much of the rubble. Around 3,000 people were killed, out of a total population of 410,000. Many of the survivors fled across the bay, one of the earthquake's many lasting consequences for the history of California.

SUGGESTED READING

Abbott, *How Cities Won the West*.

Bakken and Farrington, *The American West*.

Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.

Larsen, *The Urban West at the End of the Frontier*.

Stratton, *Pioneer Women*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

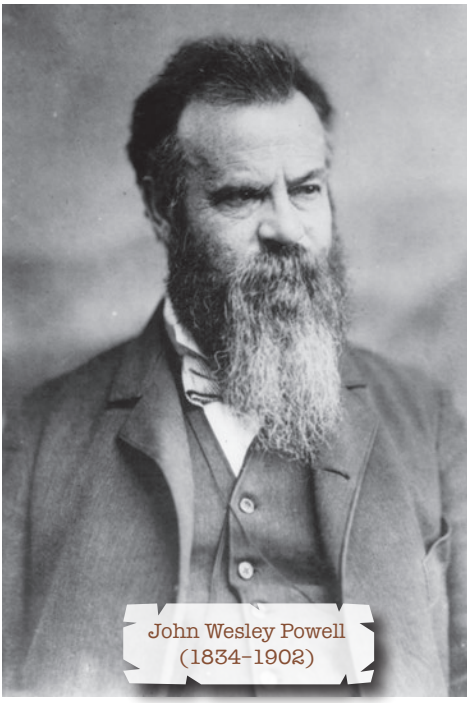
1. Are towns necessary, or merely convenient? Why did so many towns in the West lose population while others gained it?
2. What explains the dominance of hubs like St. Louis, Denver, Chicago, and San Francisco, and the comparative insignificance of thousands of other western towns?

Lecture 18

JOHN WESLEY POWELL AND THE DESERT SOUTHWEST

By the treaty that ended the Mexican War in 1848, the United States received thousands of square miles of desert land. Twenty years after its acquisition, however, the land still had not been mapped, and there were few permanent settlements. This was the state of affairs when John Wesley Powell—an adventurer, scholar, and former army officer—set out to explore and map the desert Southwest.

JOHN WESLEY POWELL


John Wesley Powell (1834–1902)

- John Wesley Powell was born in upstate New York in 1834. His parents were English immigrants. Raised mostly in Illinois, Powell was adventurous from an early age. As a teenager, he walked across Wisconsin one summer. At age 21, he rowed the length of the Mississippi River. The following year, he rowed the length of the Ohio River.

- A Union army officer in the Civil War, Powell was badly wounded by a gunshot at the battle of Shiloh, which led to the amputation of his right arm. When he returned home, he became a professor of geology at Illinois Wesleyan University, despite having never graduated from college. Always eager to travel and explore, he was far too restless to live the life of a conventional professor.

- During the late 1860s, Powell headed west every summer to explore the rock formations of Colorado. In 1869, as the first transcontinental railroad was nearing completion, he set out to become the first man to make his way by boat down the Colorado River. The Colorado's outlet in the Gulf of California was known, as was the Grand Canyon, but the river's exact route from source to mouth had never been traveled or mapped.

- Powell was the same kind of assiduous observer and notetaker as Lewis and Clark had been. Despite encountering a number of hardships,

Powell and his men were fascinated by the land formations they encountered—the pinnacles and buttresses of the Grand Canyon, for example—which were utterly unlike anything back East.

- Powell and his men named mountains after themselves, after mythological figures, and after events that happened to them. A stretch of river in which the party lost much of its equipment became known as Desolation Canyon. The men became anxious, having no idea how far they still had to travel, or whether they would have enough food.

- After three months, half the crew came to believe that they were bound for certain death. They tried to persuade Powell that their only hope of survival lay in leaving the boats, climbing out of the canyon, and striking off overland in the hope of finding a settlement. Powell pleaded with them not to go, but ultimately agreed to release three men who were determined to leave.


Grand Canyon

- Powell and his remaining companions sailed on. A few days later, they came to a Mormon settlement at the place where the Virgin River emptied into the Colorado. Brigham Young had told the inhabitants to be on the lookout for them. The three men who had abandoned the party disappeared, most likely killed by Shivwits Indians.

- News of Powell's emergence from the canyon travelled back East, and he returned to a hero's welcome. He made another trip down the canyon in 1872, bringing better equipment, more scientific instruments, a photographer, and a more professional crew. The two journeys formed the basis for his book, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, which was first published in 1875.

- In subsequent journeys, Powell met with many of the Indian peoples of the area, learning enough of their languages to talk with them and record many of their traditions. In the 1880s, he was appointed as director of the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of Ethnology, for which he catalogued the various tribal and linguistic groups in the area.

- In 1881, Powell became the second director of the United States Geological Survey. In this role, he undertook a comprehensive mapping of all the mountain ranges, valleys, rivers, and canyons surrounding the Grand Canyon. This was the final portion of the contiguous United States to be fully explored and documented, and Powell deserves more credit for the achievement than anyone else.

EARLY IRRIGATION EFFORTS

- Many Americans—politicians and railroad executives, in particular—hoped that the Southwest, like the Great Plains, could be settled in 160-acre lots apportioned among homestead farmers. The writings of John Wesley Powell demonstrated that such an approach was impossible in the arid lands of the Southwest. Areas with a reliable supply of fresh water could potentially support crops, Powell observed, but most of the region could never be made fertile.

- Powell argued that the land of the Southwest should be divided not into squares, but according to the pattern of its river valleys. No drop of water should be wasted, he said; every drop should be conserved and put to work, using a coherent system of dams and canals. Powell believed that only the federal government, working on sound scientific principles, would be able to undertake a project of that magnitude.

- In the lands acquired from Mexico in 1848, there was already a tradition of irrigation farming, especially around the Rio Grande. Every spring, on the feast day of Saint Isidro, the men of the local communities would assemble to clean up the irrigation ditches, which would have become clogged with silt and weeds over the preceding year.

- Similarly, the experience of the Mormons around the Great Salt Lake had shown that irrigation could transform parched desert into fertile fields. For most of each year, the many rivers flowing down from the Wasatch Mountains east of Salt Lake City were dry. In the spring and early summer, however, they became torrents as mountain snow melted. To ensure a year-round supply of water, the Mormons built dams and reservoirs, along with canals to carry the collected water to the farms where it was needed.

- In the ensuing decades, private irrigation ventures sprang up across the region, conserving water behind dams and guiding it to farms. But these operations were hamstrung by high startup costs. Years of work and a great deal of capital were necessary to dam a river and build a canal network. There was also the danger of dams bursting, a devastating event that could level towns and kill thousands of people.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

- Toward the end of the 19th century, the wisdom of John Wesley Powell's approach became increasingly apparent. Western boosters realized that their best bet was to persuade the federal government to undertake the costly preliminary work on which irrigation projects could build.

- In 1902, Congress passed the National Reclamation Act. The statute provided that the federal government would build dams on the most promising rivers, thus enabling homesteaders to create viable, irrigated farms downstream. After a brief initial grace period, however, settlers would be required to contribute to repayment of the engineering costs associated with the construction.

- Various problems soon developed. One such problem was that American agriculture was already suffering from the problem of overproduction. As a result, it was difficult for irrigation farmers to make enough money from selling their crops to repay the federal government. Farmers lobbied hard for the grace period to be extended. Local governments often supported these efforts, fearing that their communities might otherwise fail.

- Another problem was that large-scale enterprises acquired many of the best sites for irrigation farming. The ideal of widespread property-ownership by families, each with its own 160-acre farm, was rarely realized. Instead, corporate farming—what we now call agribusiness—soon dominated. These large farms became characteristic of much of the irrigated West in the 20th century. They employed migrant workers, often recent immigrants from China, Japan, the Philippines, or Mexico. These practices created a mobile rural proletariat never envisioned by the legislators who passed the Homestead Act.

- Another problem was the unpredictable power of the rivers themselves, especially the Colorado. Southeast of Los Angeles there was an immense flat area named the Salton Sink. A consortium of farming companies saw great promise in the area and renamed it Imperial Valley. In 1901, they built a canal to the Colorado River. In 1905, the river jumped its banks, diverted itself into the canal, and poured millions of gallons per minute into the new settlement. Imperial Valley's farms and towns were washed away, and the area soon became a vast lake.

- The politicians and businessmen of the Western states drained by the Colorado recognized that they needed a strong, high dam on


Hoover Dam

the river itself. The Colorado River Compact, signed in 1922, was an agreement allocating water among each of these Western states. In 1935, the federal government opened the Hoover Dam, named for former president Herbert Hoover.

- The Hoover Dam transformed the Colorado River. It created a much steadier flow downstream, as well as a vast reservoir—Lake Mead—upstream. It provided hydroelectric power, flood control, and irrigation water, as well as a water supply for cities such as Boulder, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. Subsequent dams along the lower Colorado permitted the conservation of many years' water supply, along with a massive increase in the area's population, fertility, and productivity.

SUGGESTED READING

Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*.

Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*.

Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*.

Worster, *Rivers of Empire*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why was the Southwest so late to be explored, mapped, and developed?
2. Why was it difficult for irrigation projects and decentralized homestead farming to coexist?

Lecture 19

WOMEN IN THE WILD WEST

In the 19th century, middle-class Americans believed that men and women had distinct and separate roles to play in society. Women were expected to stay home, raise God-fearing children, and elevate their families' moral tone. It followed that a place without women would be deficient in religion and morality. The frontier West, where men vastly outnumbered women, was just such a place.

OUT OF BALANCE

- The first women who migrated to the unruly mining and cowboy towns were often prostitutes. The handful of middle-class women who did find themselves in such places found much to be indignant about, and a great deal of moral work to be done. Paradoxically, their efforts to bring domesticity to the West sometimes required them to step outside their conventional domestic roles and become unusually active in community affairs.

- The mining camps of the California Gold Rush were the most extreme example of gender imbalance. Cowboy towns, such as Abilene in the late 1860s, were almost as imbalanced, particularly when cowboys flooded in at the end of a long cattle drive.

- Many men living in mining camps had left their families behind, and few planned to stay permanently. In the meantime, they lived according to a moral code much less rigorous than they had back home, alternating between bouts of intense hard work and sprees of heavy drinking and gambling.

- Middle-class women on the frontier tried to recreate the kind of society they had grown up with back East, one built around domestic values and Protestant Christianity. They often allied themselves with influential businessmen, who hoped to turn boomtowns into more stable and civilized places. Together, they worked to close saloons, brothels, and gambling dens, or at least confine them to designated parts of town.

- Gender imbalance was less acute in homesteading communities. Men still predominated, however, especially when an area was being homesteaded for the first time. Homesteading men would often arrive first, doing a few years' hard work before their families joined them. Homesteading women had often moved west reluctantly. Homesteading could be a grueling experience, wearing away reserves of good nature.

- The coming of women and children in farm country was no guarantee of felicity, but it at least created balanced communities more quickly than in the mining camps. Homesteading European immigrants who moved to America en masse would sometimes reconstruct their old communities, as nearly as possible, right from the outset. Strong kinship networks helped such settlers deal with the many new experiences and demands they faced.

ON THE TRAIL

- Before the arrival of the railroad, a generation of pioneers immigrated to homestead farms using overland trails. The experience of months-long journeys on the trails was hard on everybody, but most of all on women. They were understandably eager for the company of other women—as companions, sharers in their ordeals, and preservers of their mutual dignity.

- Overland trails were hardest of all on pregnant women and those with newborn children. Many wrote diary entries about the arrival of new babies, all too many of whom died in their first days of life and were buried beside the trail. The diarists' reticence to provide specifics regarding their experiences in childbirth leave many details unclear. The accounts we do have, however, indicate that this was an area in which women rallied around each other and excluded the men.

- After weeks or months on the trail, pioneer women often faced another ordeal: adapting, at least temporarily, to a way of life far harsher than they had enjoyed back East. Living in log cabins, dugouts, or sod houses—which were usually cramped, dark, and damp—required fortitude and forbearance.

- Many pioneer women had been forced to abandon some or all of their treasured possessions along the trail, and now felt impoverished and exhausted. Some complained of having to cook over open fires for years before they could afford to buy wood stoves. Others

fretted that their children were going to run wild. Women who were able to adapt, however, often expressed a sense of gratitude for the opportunity that homesteading had given them.

WORKING HARD

- Photographs of immigrant women and farmers' wives show them wearing clothes that, to our eyes, are strikingly impractical. Victorian rules of decorum required floor-length skirts of gingham or calico, often with several layers of petticoats, as well as elaborate bonnets. Respectable farmers' wives on the frontier struggled to balance an appearance of respectability with the work that had to be done at home and on their farms.

- Many pioneer women recorded the long and labor-intensive process of making their own clothes—from shearing the sheep, to carding, spinning, and weaving the cloth, to tailoring the final garments. In the days before indoor plumbing, electricity, and supermarkets, women's work was long and hard.

- Carrying water could be a backbreaking task unless there was a well or stream close by. Equally demanding and repetitive was gathering fuel. In wooded areas, this might be fallen tree branches. On the plains, however, it was often buffalo chips—desiccated buffalo dung.

- Meat had to be butchered and preserved by salting. Vegetables and fruit had to be canned or dried. Grain had to be ground into flour, then baked into bread. Everything in the household had to be cleaned by hand, a slow, painstaking process. Doing laundry was equally difficult in the days before washing machines.

- Doctors were rarely among the first settlers of frontier communities, and it was common for women to double as healers. When their husbands were away, women also had to take responsibility for the crops, as well as the day-to-day operations of the farm.

- One of the few Western settlements where women outnumbered men was Salt Lake City. The Mormons permitted polygamy, and their leader, Brigham Young, was famous for having 55 wives. Theological justifications aside, one practical advantage of plural marriage was that few women were left unmarried and vulnerable in the harsh environment of Mormon Utah.

GETTING INVOLVED

- In settlements where men far outnumbered women, those women who were present were usually prostitutes. Few women entered the trade willingly, however; for women who were widowed or abandoned, prostitution was often the only way to avoid starvation. Prostitutes

wives of Brigham Young

frequently suffered from sexually transmitted diseases, violent physical abuse, and drug addiction, and many committed suicide.

- Signs that an Anglo-American community was sinking roots in a new Western locality included the building of schools, libraries, and Protestant churches. One of the great advocates of education as the way to civilize Western settlements was Catharine Beecher, famous in her day as a women's advice writer.

- A common understanding at the time was that unlike men, women were selfless by nature, and were therefore well-suited to work as schoolteachers, bringing manners, morals, and culture—typically for very little pay—to an area that might otherwise sink into barbarism.

- In an era marked by ardent evangelical faith, some women became missionaries, either to the Indians or to unchurched mining and farming communities. Some missionaries, including Narcissa Whitman and her husband Marcus, were killed by the Indians they were attempting to convert.

- Many missionary women faced fates far less tragic than Narcissa Whitman, but nevertheless struggled to balance numerous demands on their time—as mothers, as housekeepers, as preachers, as fundraisers, and as leaders in the white women's community.

- The late 19th century was also the heyday of the temperance movement. The movement scored an impressive early victory in 1880 when, by referendum, the state of Kansas voted for prohibition. Enforcing the law proved more difficult, however, and the women of the temperance movement spent decades trying to get the authorities to live up to the letter of the law.

- The most famous temperance advocate was a preacher's wife named Carry Nation. Dissatisfied with the decorous methods of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Nation began to kneel outside saloons, singing hymns. When the barkeeper arrived, she would

declare: "Good morning, destroyer of men's souls." Eventually, she began entering saloons and smashing them to pieces with an axe, often getting herself arrested to increase publicity.

- The cause of women's suffrage was far less popular than the temperance movement, but it nevertheless drew the attention of many enterprising Western women. Wyoming, a western territory, first gave women the right to vote in 1869. Wyoming would go on to be the first state to elect a female governor, Nellie Ross, in 1924.

- In Utah, women were given the right to vote in 1870. When votes by Utah's women suggested their acceptance of polygamy, however, Congress intervened. The Edmunds-Tucker Act, passed in 1887, prohibited the women of Utah from voting. The church outlawed polygamy in 1896, and the territory of Utah finally became a state. At that point, the right of women to vote was restored in the new state's constitution.

SUGGESTED READING

Ellis, *The Life of an Ordinary Woman*.

Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*.

Royce, *A Frontier Lady*.

Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*.

Stratton, *Pioneer Women*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why did the temperance and women's suffrage movements resonate among Western women in the late 19th century? Do you think that the conditions of their everyday lives affected their views of other issues?
2. Do Western women's concerns and priorities seem reasonable, in light of what we know about their material circumstances?

Lecture 20

FROM TERRITORIES TO WESTERN STATES

The admission of a new state into the Union—something that happened 21 times between 1845 and 1912—changed the alignment of power in American politics, moving its center of gravity steadily westward. Westerners relied heavily on support from the East, especially from the federal government. At the same time, they often felt aggrieved by the idea that the West was being exploited by the longer-established parts of the nation.

PATHS TO STATEHOOD

- The experiences of Western states on the way to statehood varied greatly. Some were so strategically important from the outset and increased in population so rapidly that they were able to join the Union almost at once. California is one notable example. For many other territories, however, the process was more gradual.

- The Founding Fathers had foreseen the possibility of national expansion, and established rules in the Constitution for creating first territories, and then states. Congress was authorized to create territorial governments in newly settled or newly acquired areas. Eventually, territories would draft constitutions and petition for statehood.

- One advantage of being a territory was that many administrative costs were borne by the federal government. As Western territories were often in areas where Native Americans were being forcibly displaced, military costs were high, and help from the army was indispensable. Once an area became a state, however, it had to pay its own way.

- The great disadvantage of being a territory was that territorial governors, who were appointed by the president, were often no more than political cronies. The first governor of the Dakota Territory, for example, was Abraham Lincoln's family doctor in Illinois, and had run Lincoln's presidential campaign there—a territorial governorship was Lincoln's way of saying thank you in 1861.

- As territorial populations grew, influential local citizens—usually the territory's leading businessmen—campaigned for statehood. Statehood would increase the authority of these influential citizens, and diminish that of Congress. Statehood would allow them to allocate taxes, regulate local businesses, and acquire more land.

- Usually a territory needed 40,000 voters before its petition for statehood would be accepted. One obstacle many aspiring states

had to overcome was opposition from the federal government. If there was a Democratic majority in Congress, for example, and it foresaw that a new state would send Republican representatives and senators to Congress, it had an obvious incentive to oppose statehood.

- Political sympathy between a territory and Congress could make the process relatively easy, however. Nevada, for example, was hurried into the Union despite larger populations in other territories. Abraham Lincoln and the Republican-controlled Congress knew that Nevada's people were strongly pro-Union and pro-Republican.

- Local conditions sometimes created a stumbling block on the road to statehood. In Utah, for example, the population was overwhelmingly Mormon. Because the Mormons practiced polygamy, Congress refused statehood for Utah. In 1890, Wilford Woodruff, the head of the church, received a divine revelation specifying that the era of Mormon polygamy was at an end. Utah entered the Union in 1896.

LOCAL CONTROL

- Western states' constitutions were influenced by the United States Constitution, and some states openly copied those of others. Nevada's first state constitution, for example, was nearly identical to California's. Most constitutions reflected local concerns—attracting railroads with favorable taxation, for example, or regulating grain elevator companies to prevent monopolization.

- In every aspiring new state, the prospect of statehood provoked fierce local controversies between groups who anticipated benefiting from the change and those who feared they would lose by it. Towns competed to become a new state's capital, to become county seats, and to be selected as sites for state universities, asylums, prisons, and other institutions.

- The achievement of statehood by the western states was nearly always bad news for the Native Americans living there. The men now in power were often the same men who had invaded the Native Americans' traditional lands, often with the help of the army. State governments were eager to reduce the amount of land set aside for Indian reservations. The Dawes Severalty Act, passed in 1887, facilitated the sale of reservation land to white settlers.

- One of the issues to be decided by territories and new states was whether to allow women to vote. The first territory to take this momentous step was Wyoming, in 1869. Always low in population because of its elevation and arid environment, Wyoming welcomed the publicity its decision caused. The territory's lopsidedly male population hoped the decision would attract more women.

- Achieving statehood did not immediately nullify federal influence. The federal government continued to be a major landholder in new states—a source of a friction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Local business interests usually favored a maximum of economic development. Some individuals, however, began to fear the

exhaustion of natural resources, and successfully advocated for the creation of forest reserves by the federal government.

BOOMS AND BUSTS

- One of the enduring characteristics of Western history, before and after statehood, was the problem of economic instability—huge booms followed by crushing recessions. This economic uncertainty was due to the kind of activities to which the West was best suited. The first of these was commercial agriculture. The Great Plains' massive agricultural output was a mixed blessing for farmers, as the increase in supply pushed profits steadily lower.

- Even more unstable than agriculture was the mining industry. Three factors contributed to its volatility: the difficulty of estimating the size of mineral deposits, the violence of labor relations, and changing government policies toward the monetization of gold and silver. The mining industry in the West would remain volatile throughout the 20th century.

- Less volatile, and correspondingly more desirable, was the West's oil industry. Until the 1890s, no one knew for certain that Western oil fields were available for development. The invention of automobiles in the 1890s increased the incentive to search, and large oil fields were soon opened up in California, Texas, and Oklahoma.

- The creation of territories and states was often imperfect, and sometimes violent. Nevertheless, it was the most effective method available, given the geographical extent of the West and the state of transportation and communications at the time. By 1912, each state of the Lower 48 had achieved statehood.

SUGGESTED READING

Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, *Colorado*.

Gibson, *The History of Oklahoma*.

Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana*.

Schwantes, *In Mountain Shadows*.

Tweton and Jelliff, *North Dakota*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Was the progression from territory to state managed judiciously in the post–Civil War West? Who was most likely to suffer or benefit from the way the statehood process was carried out?
2. Did local pride play a role in long-standing Western suspicion of federal power?

Lecture 21

WESTERN VIOLENCE, LAW, AND ORDER

Conquering the West required a great deal of force; settling and pacifying this vast area required a great deal more. Most Western territories endured years of vigilante justice, during which suspected criminals were hanged or flogged by angry mobs. Other sources of violence included widespread theft, ethnic conflict, and labor disputes.

THIEVES AND VIGILANTES

- Violence was rampant in the 19th-century American West. Foreign travelers between 1860 and 1900 often mentioned how many Western men were armed, and that they displayed a prickly sense of honor backed by bravado and courage. These conditions made violence common and often lethal.

- Western gold rushes provided the perfect conditions for vigilante justice to arise. In the gold camps, hundreds of men lived and worked side by side. When a thief was discovered, the men of the camp often created ad hoc courts to deal with the offender. The typical punishments for theft were flogging or banishment. If the offense was more serious, the offender was hanged.

- In the mining camps, as well as in the growing city of San Francisco, vigilante justice was popular. Newspaper editors supported vigilantism as a necessary response to what would otherwise be chaos and brute force. They also appreciated that it saved the nascent community a lot of money and time. The speed and ferocity of vigilante punishments was designed to have the strongest possible deterrent effect.

- The states and territories of the plains and mountain West showed comparable patterns of vigilante justice. While miners feared that the gold dust they were painstakingly accumulating might be stolen, cattlemen had to be vigilant against the threat of horse and cattle theft. Vigilante justice and even vendettas were commonly seen as defensible.

- In 1863, Bannack, a remote Montana community, was plagued by a gang of hijackers. The hijackers would attack gold convoys and stagecoaches, seizing property and killing travelers. Citizens in the area formed a vigilance committee, only to discover that the mastermind behind the hijackings was their own sheriff, Henry Plummer. Plummer had made a fortune in the California Gold Rush, but had gone to prison after a conviction for murder. After a

successful appeal, Plummer had moved to Montana, impressed the local citizens, and won election as sheriff.

RUSTLERS AND ROBBERS

- The Montana vigilantes who organized to oppose Plummer acted in broad daylight. They seized a member of Plummer's gang, George Ives, and examined him at an outdoor trial that lasted three days despite icy winter weather. At the end of the trial, Ives was summarily hanged. The committee went on to round up the other members of the gang. In all, the committee lynched 20 men, including Plummer.

- Another Montana vigilance committee, known as Stuart's Stranglers, hunted down cattle rustlers across the territory. One of the territory's wealthiest ranchers, Granville Stuart was enraged by the theft of a prize stallion and 35 cattle. His vigilantes killed many thieves, variously estimated at between 20 and 100.

- The notorious James gang, led by brothers Frank and Jesse James, carried out at least four train robberies in the 1870s. Another famous train robbery was perpetrated by Butch Cassidy at Wilcox, Wyoming, in 1899. Statistically, however, train robberies were rare. Banks were easier targets—and more likely to be full of money—and were thus a more frequent location of Western robberies.

- Violence was also common in the cow towns of Kansas, where the cattle drives of the 1860s and 1870s ended. Cowboys often rode into town and cut loose after months of solitude on the trail. The cities certainly wanted their business, but knew that they had to police the cowboys—by disarming them, arresting them, or, if necessary, shooting them. Killing was the exception rather than the rule, however.

RACE RIOTS

- Vigilantes believed that justice could only be achieved through collective public action. The same was true of the era's periodic race riots, in which members of the white majority proudly declared their racial views, then attacked members of ethnic minority groups. Mexicans, Chileans, and Chinese were popular targets.

- Working-class whites bitterly resented Chinese workers for the economic competition they represented and for their willingness to work for low wages. Allegations of dishonesty, clannishness, and opium addiction were common.

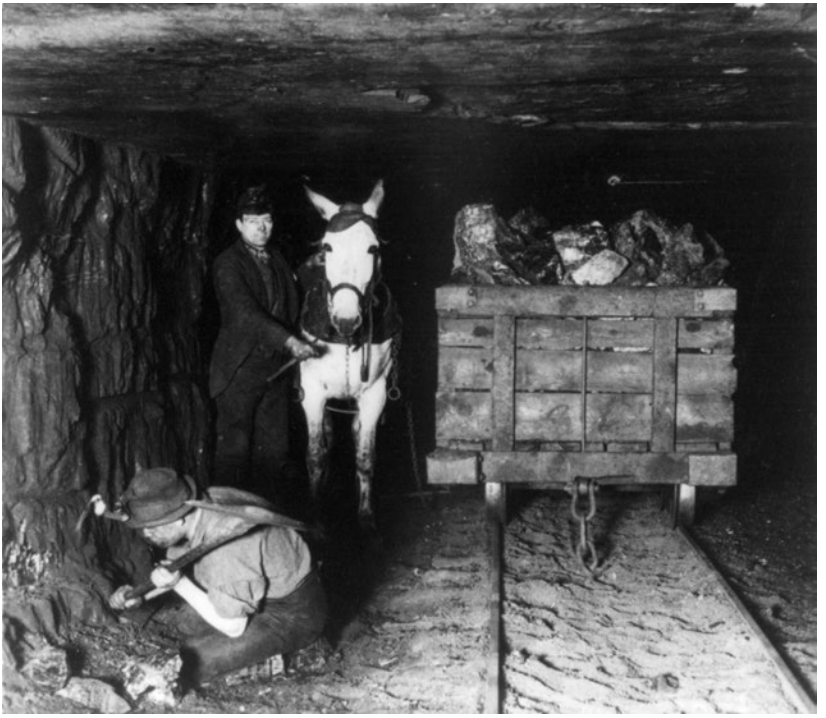
- In California, widespread anti-Chinese racism led to a ban on Chinese votes in 1879. Chinese immigration was the subject of the federal Chinese Exclusion Act, which was passed by Congress in 1882. The following year, an economic downturn led to further scapegoating of Chinese workers.

- In 1885, white miners in Wyoming killed 30 Chinese who refused to join in a strike against the mine's owner. Hundreds more were chased out of

town and into the mountains. More anti-Chinese rioting, amounting to a campaign of ethnic cleansing, took place in Washington, in the cities of Seattle and Tacoma. In 1886, street mobs forced thousands of Chinese to flee. Ten gold workers who stayed were murdered the following year.

CLASS CONFLICTS

- Some of the worst violence in the American West involved class conflicts at mining operations. Mine owners tended to be tough, hard-bitten entrepreneurs with a ruthless streak. Working conditions in their mines were chronically unsafe; deaths from fire, collapsed tunnels, and gas inhalation were common.



- To make matters worse, mine owners rarely paid their workers in money. Instead, they paid them in scrip, a private currency that workers could only redeem at company-owned stores, where prices were high and quality was low. In mountain districts, workers usually lived in company housing as well, which made them exceptionally vulnerable to the will of mine owners.

- Mine workers reacted by forming unions. Hard rock workers, who mined metals, formed the Western Federation of Miners. Coal miners formed the United Mine Workers of America. The unions campaigned for safer conditions, a checkweighman to ensure that the ore and coal they brought to the surface was being weighed honestly, an eight-hour workday, and collective bargaining rights.

- Mine owners fought tooth and nail against the unions, fearing loss of control and loss of profitability. If state authorities and local communities supported union members, they had a better chance of achieving their goals. That's what happened in Cripple Creek, Colorado, in 1894, when Governor Davis Waite sent in the militia to safeguard striking miners. Governor Waite spoke with mine owners and persuaded them not to lengthen the workday from eight hours to 10 (without a pay increase), as they had intended.

- Later governors, Republicans and Democrats, sided more often with management, afraid that strikes would damage their states' reputations for business. When Cripple Creek miners went on strike again in 1903, for example, Governor James Peabody issued injunctions and sent in the state militia to help the mine owners. This time, the union was defeated. Mine owners did not hesitate to infiltrate the unions with spies, and particularly dedicated union leaders were often assaulted, intimidated, or kidnapped.

- In the early 20th century, industrial workplaces were frequent scenes of violence and class conflict. Workers were enraged at bad conditions, low pay, dangerous workplaces, and unscrupulous treatment by their bosses. Owners of industrial corporations resisted by hiring

spies, infiltrators, and agents provocateurs, and by using Pinkerton detectives to intimidate or assault union leaders.

- Harrison Gray Otis, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, refused to let his workforce unionize. He also published strong anti-union editorials. In 1910, two radical labor activists, the McNamara brothers, dynamited the newspaper's offices, killing 21 people and injuring 100 more. They tried to kill Otis himself, but the bomb they planted at his home failed to explode.

SUGGESTED READING

Brown, "Violence."

Gard, *Frontier Justice*.

Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*.

Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are historians or psychologists more useful in understanding the long American romance with guns and vigilantism?
2. What does the history of the American West suggest about the relationship between freedom, mobility, and violence?

Lecture 22

PROTECTING YELLOWSTONE AND YOSEMITE

In America, national parks are areas set aside by the federal government for the enjoyment of the nation's people. Economic activities such as hunting, mining, and drilling are forbidden, as is residential development. Two of the West's greatest national parks—Yellowstone and Yosemite—were also two of the first. Early preservation efforts at the two parks provide an excellent source of insight into the development of America's national park system.

EXPLORING YELLOWSTONE

- Yellowstone, which can reasonably claim to be the first national park in the world, was an obvious choice for preservation. The geology of the park is extraordinary. Yellowstone contains geysers, like Old Faithful, as well as beautiful mountains, immense waterfalls, and mysterious, bubbling sulfur springs.

- Trappers and other mountain men were occasional visitors to Yellowstone in the years before the Civil War. They returned with tales of boiling springs and geysers, conjuring in the minds of the public the image of a strange, remote mountain place. After the Civil War, a series of survey parties set out to explore the area systematically.

- The Smithsonian Institution, founded in 1846, offered support and expertise to the geological surveys in the 1860s and 1870s. The surveyors and their supporters at the Smithsonian aimed to replace legends and personal impressions of Yellowstone with sound, scientific information.

- The most important of these early surveys was made in 1871, by respected geologist Ferdinand Hayden. Congress provided a grant of $40,000, enabling Hayden's expedition to do high-quality surveying, mapping, and topography of the whole area. The surveyors' report ran to 500 detailed pages.

- Among promoters of Hayden's survey was Jay Cooke, a larger-than-life financier who had helped keep the Union army afloat financially during the worst years of the Civil War. Cooke realized that if he could promote tourism to Yellowstone, his Northern Pacific Railroad would be able to attract high-paying customers. He therefore supported including among Hayden's surveyors a painter, Thomas Moran, and a photographer, William Henry Jackson.

- Photography was invented in the 1830s, but was still out of reach economically to all but a tiny elite. The role of Moran and Jackson was,

therefore, central to the success of the venture. Their images showed just how magnificent Yellowstone really was. Moran's paintings of Yellowstone made his career; they were so successful, in fact, that he renamed himself Thomas Yellowstone Moran.

PROTECTING YELLOWSTONE

- Congress passed legislation to protect Yellowstone in 1872. Yellowstone thus became America's first national park, and indeed the first in the world. Congress justified its decision by arguing that the land's commercial value was insignificant compared to its scientific value and scenic beauty. Congress also appointed Yellowstone's first superintendent, Nathaniel Longford.

- What Congress didn't do, unfortunately, was allocate any money for Longford's salary or for the administration of the park. At 3,500 square miles, Yellowstone was three times the size of Rhode Island. And the park included plenty of formidable terrain that was high, difficult to traverse, and subject to severe winters. Montana congressmen were skeptical of the entire operation and tried to limit its extent. Meanwhile, poachers continued to hunt elk, deer, and buffalo within the park.

- In 1877, just one year after Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn, Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé led 750 of his people through Yellowstone in an attempt to reach Canada. Aggressive white settlers had forced the Nez Percé off their traditional lands in Oregon's Wallowa Valley, and an army column was in hot pursuit. The sudden arrival of the Nez Percé in Yellowstone alarmed a group of tourists, who had come to appreciate the areas natural beauty. Chief Joseph's band was defeated shortly thereafter, and the Nez Percé were forced into a humiliating surrender.

- In 1880, the secretary of the interior appointed hunter, trapper, and bullwhacker Harry Yount as Yellowstone's first gamekeeper. Yount, who had been a member of Hayden's 1871 expedition, is widely regarded

as America's first park ranger. He held the job of gamekeeper for only 14 months, but his reports made it clear what needed to be done to preserve the park's land and protect its wildlife.

- In 1883, the Northern Pacific Railroad completed its transcontinental line, which ran just north of the park. It also built a luxurious hotel and advertised Yellowstone's natural wonder, gradually turning it into one of the West's premier tourist destinations.

- Early tourists found very little wildlife, however. Buffalo had been hunted to near-extinction; antelope, elk, mule deer, wolves, bears, coyotes, and other species targeted by hunters were similarly scarce. In 1886, federal officials finally began to enforce the rules against hunting within Yellowstone, sending a troop of soldiers to patrol the park. In the meantime, wild animals were rounded up elsewhere and herded into Yellowstone.

EXPLORING YOSEMITE

- Yosemite is located in California, among the mountains of the Sierra Nevada. Its story begins with John Muir, an eccentric nature lover who devoted the later years of his life to creating and preserving Yosemite as a national park.

- Muir was born in Scotland but grew up in Wisconsin, the son of immigrant farmers. His parents were severely puritanical, and imposed on their son sober rounds of churchgoing and Bible-memorization. Muir developed a religion of his own, however, one that found God in the wild places of nature.

- In the mid-1860s, Muir went to work as a wagon builder in Indianapolis. One day, he was temporarily blinded after being hit in the eye by a tool. He swore that if he recovered, he would spend the rest of his life outdoors in the natural world. When his eyesight was restored, Muir embarked on a great hike from Indianapolis to Florida. His book about the experience, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, shows that he was an observant and accomplished naturalist, particularly in the fields of geology and botany.

- Muir moved to California, where he began to explore the Sierra Nevada, the mountain range in which Yosemite is located. He wrote later that his first sight of the range was one of the greatest moments of his life. Muir described Yosemite itself, with its amazing rock formations like Half Dome and El Capitan, as "an immense hall, or temple lighted from above," adding that "no temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite."

- Muir built a cabin for himself, working irregularly as a shepherd and as a mountain guide. He was a talented mountaineer, but nearly died on more than one occasion. When lightning storms rolled across the valley, Muir would sometimes climb the tallest tree in the area, just to get a better view of the scene. He became convinced that Yosemite

would be better and more valuable if it remained unchanged by human development.

PRESERVING YOSEMITE

- White settlers in California had always admired and celebrated Yosemite as a place of exceptional natural beauty. A German painter, Albert Bierstadt, gave Easterners a vivid impression of Yosemite in paintings of comparable size, brilliance, and romanticism to Thomas Moran's paintings of Yellowstone.

- Congress's first act to protect Yosemite took place in 1864. Prompted by a group of concerned citizens, Congress entrusted the running of Yosemite to the state of California. Muir, who arrived in 1869, believed that the state was not sufficiently rigorous in ensuring the land's protection.

Half Dome in Yosemite National Park

- Muir began to write articles for Eastern periodicals arguing that Yosemite and the surrounding environment should receive enhanced protections and federal oversight. Muir's campaign eventually succeeded. Yosemite became a national park in 1890, although park administration remained in local hands.

- In 1892, Muir and his friends founded the Sierra Club. Muir served as the club's president for the remaining 22 years of his life. Other members included prominent scientists from Berkeley and Stanford, who admired Muir's encyclopedic knowledge of geology, botany, and glaciology. They also admired and shared his dedication to preserving Yosemite, and campaigned for further restrictions against development.

- President Theodore Roosevelt visited Yosemite in 1903. Roosevelt had done more than anyone to ensure the preservation and enlargement of what was becoming a national park system, and wanted to see how much progress had been made. Muir was the president's guide, and the two of them left the majority of Roosevelt's entourage behind as they hiked through the backcountry. Impressed by Muir's vision for the area, Roosevelt approved legislation in 1906 that placed Yosemite under direct federal control.

- In 1916, Congress formed the National Park Service. The agency was charged with administration of 15 national parks and 22 national monuments that had been established in places of exceptional natural beauty or historical interest in the West. Among these were

Crater Lake, Oregon

Crater Lake, in Oregon; Mount Rainier, in Washington; Rocky Mountain National Park, in Colorado; and Sequoia National Park, in California. America's national park system has flourished ever since.

SUGGESTED READING

Chase, *Playing God in Yellowstone*.

Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*.

Meyer, *The Spirit of Yellowstone*.

Sanborn, *Yosemite*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is a park? What does it do, and how do visitors explain their attraction to it?
2. In what ways would conservationists like Gifford Pinchot and preservationists like John Muir agree about the natural world, and in what ways would they disagree?

Lecture 23

MYTHOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN WEST

From the colonial period to the 20th century, the idea of the West exercised a magnetic appeal over generations of Americans. It was where families could travel in search of a new start, and a land of new opportunities and profound transformations. It epitomized the idea that to be American was to be mobile, restless, and enterprising. The lure of this ideal is so strong, in fact, that it can sometimes be difficult to separate myth from reality.

THE FRONTIER THESIS

- Imagine the collective sense of American dismay in 1890 when the U.S. Census Bureau declared that the western frontier had disappeared. Ever since the census began, a century earlier, the frontier line, marking the point reached by new generations of settlers, had been drawn on the map that accompanied the official census report. Settlement throughout the continent by 1890 was dense enough that such a line could no longer be drawn. There was no point beyond which the land could be described as unsettled.

- This disclosure provoked historian Frederick Jackson Turner to write an essay titled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which he presented at the 1893 world's fair in Chicago. Turner had grown up among a generation of historians who explained American democracy as the outgrowth of ancient Germanic traditions that were brought to the New World by England, and which reached their ultimate expression in the U.S. Constitution.

- According to Turner, however, it was the frontier that had formed America's distinctive national character and democratic ethos. As Turner told it, each generation of settlers migrated toward the interior, grappled with frontier conditions, temporarily reverted to a more primitive lifestyle, cooperated with each other, subdued the wilderness, built new institutions, then passed the torch to another generation of settlers who went even farther west.

- This idea, known as the frontier thesis, was gratifying to Americans because it minimized the role of Europe in the creation of democracy and suggested that the nation's greatness grew out of the experience of ordinary people. It also appeared to explain American exceptionalism—why America had avoided so many of the characteristic pitfalls of European modernization.

- Historians chipped away at the frontier thesis for a century, and it no longer retains much credibility as a general explanation for American

history. To begin with, Turner's thesis depended on its portrayal of Native Americans as savages standing in the way of civilization, rather than victims of conquest. It also said nothing about women, and relied heavily on Darwinian metaphors that scarcely correspond to historical reality. The influence of Turner's thesis was immense, however, and not just on generations of historians.

POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT

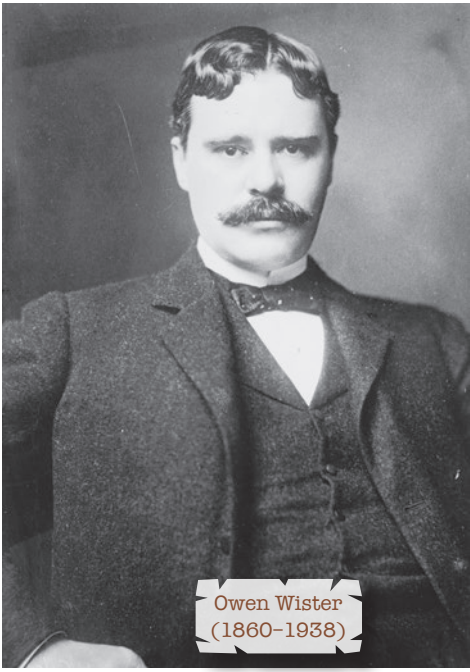
- Even before the closing of the frontier, poets, musicians and writers had begun to romanticize Western life. Bandits like Jesse James, Billy the Kid, and Butch Cassidy took on an aura of glamor because of the Western settings in which popular writers placed them. None of them was a Robin Hood, taking from the rich to give to the poor, yet each became a sentimental hero whose death was treated as something to mourn rather than celebrate.

- Meanwhile, William "Buffalo Bill" Cody was turning the nuts and bolts of his early life in the actual West into the spectacle of a great Wild West show. Cody did as much as anyone to create the enduring image of the West as a place where daring horsemen, armed in equal parts with guns and chivalry, were creating a new civilization. His version of Western history was more violent than Turner's. For Cody, armed men fighting against Indians, rather than homesteaders with plows, were the central figures of the American West.

- Cody was a showman, but he had didactic instincts as well. He thought of his presentations as educational, not just entertaining, and believed that his dramatic reenactments reflected genuine history, rather than simple melodrama. Cody managed to imply that the characteristic story of Western history was one in which white men and women, not Native Americans, were the victims.

- In print, novelist Owen Wister used the Western experience as the basis for popular fiction. His novel *The Virginian*, published in 1902, is

regarded by many critics as the first recognizable Western novel. Its hero is a tough, dependable cattleman who falls in love with a comely young lady from back East. The hero represents the wildness of the frontier; the lady represents civilization. The two are married at the end of the novel—civilization wins, in other words—and the two set about creating a model community where once there was only wilderness.


Owen Wister (1860–1938)

THE VISUAL ARTS

- The turn of the 20th century was a golden age for Western artists and illustrators. Artists Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt had already played an important role in persuading Congress to designate Yellowstone and Yosemite, respectively, as national parks. Moran and Bierstadt were romantics, eager to make the wild landscape of the West seem even larger and more awe-inspiring than the reality.

- A second generation of painters emphasized not the landscape but the adventurous men who pitted themselves against it. Among the best remembered are Frederic Remington and Charles Russell, both of whom favored exact representational painting and a sense of dramatic action. Many of the scenes Remington painted—of wagon trains crossing the Oregon Trail, of Indian raiding parties, of cowboys breaking wild horses—became classics. Russell, meanwhile, specialized in commemorating particular historical moments.

- Another great artist of this period was Charles Schreyvogel. A German-American who had been trained in Munich, his inspiration came, aptly enough, from attending Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in 1893. After that, he took frequent trips to the West, sketching military scenes and talking with former troopers from the Indian wars. At his studio in Hoboken, New Jersey, he used local students and handymen as models for cavalrymen and Indian braves.

- By the early 20th century, photography was already beginning to impinge on the illustrators' market. This included motion pictures, which were improving rapidly, as well as still photos. *The Great Train Robbery*, a 1903 film by Edwin Porter, is often credited as the first movie Western. A silent film only 10 minutes in length, *The Great Train Robbery* was also the first film to have an actual plot.

- What followed was a century of variations on a theme, one involving breathtaking landscapes, the idea of mobility, violence suffered and

inflicted, and cathartic endings in which justice prevails. Women's roles in movie Westerns have nearly always been subordinate to those of men. As in *The Virginian,* women typically represent the forces of domestication and civilization, destined to displace the half-wild nature of the men who tamed the frontier. Dancing girls and prostitutes tend to have hearts of gold and inclinations to settle down if they could find the right man.

- The popularity of Westerns has declined in recent decades, in part because the ideas on which the genre once thrived have been subjected to such withering criticism. As late as the early 1950s, it was still possible to contrast heroic whites against sinister Indians in a way that William Cody would have found familiar. It was still possible to believe that domesticating and subduing the land was a heroic task. These once-conventional themes were upended, however, as American ideas about race and the environment transformed in the decades that followed.

SUGGESTED READING

Bandy and Stoehr, *Ride, Boldly Ride*.

Goetzmann and Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination*.

Grossman, *The Frontier in American Culture*.

Wills, *John Wayne's America*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How and why did history and mythology become mixed in American ideas about the West?
2. How do you explain the durable success of Western movies throughout the 20th century?

Lecture 24

WINNING THE WEST?

In the 19th century, few Americans doubted that the exploration and settlement of the American West was a triumph. It was only much later, in the late 20th century, that historians began to offer a different view of the West, one of conquest, oppression, and intolerance. On a more practical level, historians have also debated how it happened that a little republic of Anglo-Americans came to settle and domesticate an area that had eluded their rivals for 300 years.

INDUSTRY AND POLITICS

- The 19th century was the most dynamic in the history of the world up to that point. Industrialization, begun in Britain and Western Europe, gave even greater advantages to the nations that were already the richest and most powerful. Steam power harnessed to ships and railroads sped up travel beyond the dreams of any previous generation, while the telegraph made communication across great distances almost instantaneous. The development and steady improvement of firearms was another tremendous advantage.

- Capitalism, practiced as wholeheartedly in the United States as anywhere else in the world, created a superb incentive structure to generations of inventors and innovators, each convinced that they could improve upon their predecessors' technical achievements. The settlement and domestication of the West was accelerated beyond recognition by the deployment of trains, guns, barbed wire, telegraph wires, steel plows, automatic harvesting machines, windmills, and explosives.

- The Constitution, hammered out in its original form in 1787, proved to be the ideal instrument for the expanding republic. It provided for the possibility of new territories and states, creating a framework for their piecemeal incorporation into the nation.

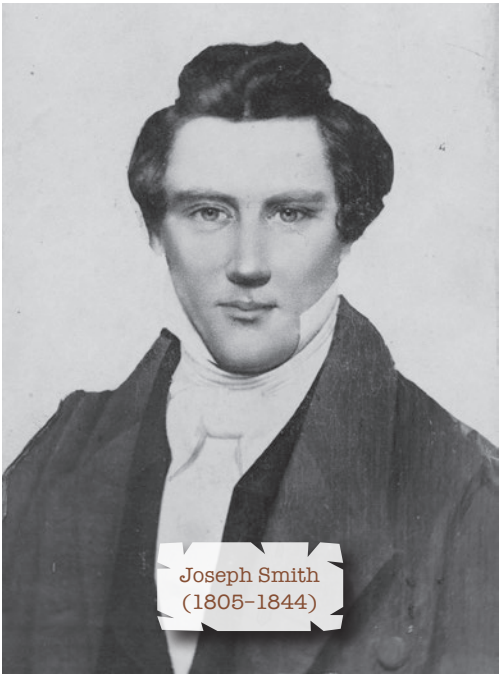
- In some instances, presidents seized favorable opportunities that were unforeseen at the time the Constitution was written. One example is Thomas Jefferson, who authorized the 1803 purchase of the immense Louisiana Territory from France. Another is James Polk, who acquired what is now the southwestern quarter of the United States from Mexico in 1848.

- America's constitutional arrangements offered individuals the leeway to travel and to take entrepreneurial initiatives, which they were more than willing to do. It also sent agents of law and order to the

expanding frontier. Law and order sometimes yielded to chaos or to vigilantism, but it was rarely long before it regained the upper hand.

- America's legal system was voluntaristic and democratic enough to win widespread assent, and the majority of Americans saw the law as their ally, not their oppressor. The division of the public domain into 160-acre homesteads, for example, was a triumph of organization, self-discipline, and voluntary subordination to the rules.

- Among the constitutional rights that Americans carried into the West were freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. All three mattered a great deal, and all were tested. Mine owners were able to intimidate Western editors when their newspapers supported strikes, and sometimes even persuaded local authorities to arrest them. Labor radicals responded, in one instance by blowing up the offices of the anti-union *Los Angeles Times*. Neither side was ultimately able to prevent the reporting of news and opinions, however.


Joseph Smith (1805–1844)

- Among the most persecuted religious groups in American history were the Mormons, a group who found a new home in the West. After the lynching of their founder, Joseph Smith, in 1844, Brigham Young led the whole community to a remote desert valley near the Great Salt Lake, where he hoped they might practice their religion unmolested into the indefinite future. Disputes over polygamy dogged relations between

territorial Utah and the federal government, but a compromise was eventually reached, and Utah joined the Union in 1896.

PLUCK AND LUCK

- The Americans who settled the West were exceptionally daring and opportunistic. In the early 1840s, for example, American farmers rushed to occupy the Pacific Northwest despite competing claims to the region by Britain, Spain, and Russia. Diplomatic histories agree that the sheer number of American settlers played an important role in the dispute's 1846 settlement, which yielded the area to the United States.

- Opportunistic Americans found ways to get rich in places that had always seemed poor. Over the course of approximately 300 years of ownership, Spain and Mexico did little with California, which under Spanish and Mexican rule remained remote and underpopulated. Within months of America's acquisition of California, gold was found, prompting migrants to rush in by the tens of thousands. Silver was found in Nevada, just as copper, lead, iron, and coal were in other Western territories.

- Thousands of prospectors remained in California after the gold rush. They began to farm the area, eventually adapting its limited water resources to profitable irrigation schemes. They showed that even desert land could be made fertile. The plains and mountains, meanwhile, yielded a harvest of crops, timber, and grazing. Over the course of a century, opportunistic Americans turned what had appeared to be some of the least valuable and most inhospitable areas of the New World into rich, productive states.

- Underlying all other reasons for American achievement in the West was that Americans were lucky. In conquering the vast territories of the West, they encountered only weak resistance, which meant that the American frontier could vault hundreds of miles each decade. Americans were also lucky to have such a vast area open to their

ambitions, and lucky that it was well endowed with minerals, water, and fertile soil.

- Some historians—especially American historians—have emphasized the uniqueness of the American experience, arguing that it is essentially unlike that of any other nation. The idea of American exceptionalism lay at the heart of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier theory, that democracy arose in the West and spread eastward. Taking a wider view, however, it's possible to see the history of the American West as one part of a worldwide process, the Europeanization of the planet.

- In the same decades that wagon trains from the East were heading to the West to explore and settle the Pacific Northwest, similar wagon trains were heading north from Cape Town into the interior of southern Africa. The African version of this event is remembered as the Great Trek. Its leaders, men like Piet Retief and Andres Pretorius, enjoy the same semi-legendary status among Afrikaners as men like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone enjoy among Americans.

- American victories over the Indians have their counterpart in Afrikaner victories over the Zulus. Usually able to defeat the indigenous peoples, both groups suffered a shocking reversal—the expansionist Americans at the Little Bighorn in 1876, and South African whites at Isandhlwana in 1879. In both cases, such defeats were the last surge of dominated and defeated peoples. The intruders' political and technological superiority proved decisive, enabling them to dominate and reorganize both areas to their liking.

- Closer to home, a parallel process was taking place in Canada. White settlers were also moving into the interior of Argentina and Brazil, establishing communities and linking up with cities along the coast of the Atlantic. Russians were pushing eastward into central Asia, often encouraging immigrant populations similar to those in the American West to join in.

EAST AND WEST

- The relationship between the Eastern and Western portions of the United States depends in large part on the time period in question. Territories that were once considered part of the West, like Tennessee and Missouri, gradually became part of the area against which the West saw itself as reacting. The West was a protean and dynamic phenomenon, sometimes more a state of mind than a fixed and definite place.

- Critics from the American West frequently alleged that Easterners exploited the West, or otherwise inhibited the West from realizing its full potential. Westerners seethed with indignation when Eastern politicians held up their petitions for statehood, sometimes for several decades. Populists in Kansas, Idaho, and Colorado in the 1880s and 1890s believed that Eastern bankers, politicians, and railroad magnates were squeezing the lifeblood out of the West by manipulating the currency and promoting monopolies.

- In the latter half of the 20th century, some historians interpreted the West using what is known as the center and periphery theory. This theory argues that the development of industrial capitalism in Britain, France, and Germany depended on colonies that provided the raw materials of industry and then became a market for the finished goods. In America, the imperial metropolis would be the industrial East, with the West providing the market and materials.

- The center and periphery theory conforms quite well with the history of Western resentment against Eastern bankers, railroads, and plutocrats. Less congruent, however, is the fact that Western states eventually gained political equality and industries of their own. This was not the case in colonial India, Jamaica, or Kenya, for example, which gained neither representation in the British legislature nor industries that could rival Britain's.

- In America, the tension between East and West had many dimensions. Citizens and politicians in new Western states resented the fact that large segments of their territory were still owned by the federal government, which prevented locals from exploiting the land for short-term gain. Questions of federal involvement in Western logging, mining, grazing, and water rights remain areas of thorny disagreement to this day.

- Settlement of the American West would have been impossible had it not been for policies worked out back East, in the nation's capital. First, and most obviously, the army spent decades defeating and subduing the Native Americans. Second, the federal land survey created a framework for the organization of new communities. Third, much of the West would have remained uninhabitable had it not been for the development of railroads and elaborate, federally financed irrigation systems.

- Even Westerners who resented the East were busy trying to emulate it. Constitutions for the newer Western states borrowed heavily from those of the older Eastern states. Western women mimicked Eastern fashions in clothing, hairstyles, and furniture, read magazines from the East, and tried to make their homes compatible with ideals of delicacy and femininity developed in London, Paris, and New York. Western school curricula were likewise deferential to examples offered by Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia.

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Deverell, *A Companion to the American West*.

Milner et al., *The Oxford History of the American West*.

Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. To what degree should historians of the American West try to answer moral questions about the rights and wrongs of conquest and settlement?
2. Which is more persuasive: the idea that American history is unlike that of all other nations, or the idea that the parallels between the U.S. and others outweigh the differences?

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Royce, Sarah. *A Frontier Lady: Recollections of the Gold Rush and Early California*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1977. The mother of philosopher Josiah Royce joined a California wagon train in the 1850s and made the difficult overland trek to San Francisco.

Sanborn, Margaret. *Yosemite: Its Discovery, Its Wonders, and Its People*. New York: Random House, 1981. Everyone who saw it was amazed, but no one did more than John Muir to ensure its protection for future generations. As usual, the Indians who had lived there for centuries drew the short straw.

Schlissel, Lillian. *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*. Schocken Books, 1982. The Oregon Trail was hard enough for tough men. It was a great deal harder for their pregnant wives, who suffered through months of privation en

route to what they hoped was a golden destination. Schlissel preserves their thoughts, dreams, hopes, and fears.

Schwantes, Carlos. *In Mountain Shadows: A History of Idaho*. Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. History of a mountain state that was dominated by mining, irrigation farming, and climatic extremes.

Singletary, Otis. *The Mexican War*. University of Chicago Press, 1960. The American army was poorly organized and badly supplied. Luckily for them, the Mexicans were in even greater disarray.

Siringo, Charles. *A Texas Cowboy: Or, Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck of a Spanish Pony*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2000. One of very few accounts by a real cowboy of the hard life on the Chisholm Trail in the 1860s and 1870s.

Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Athaneum, 1992. An immensely learned scholar of American history explains the major interpretive themes of U.S. history, and the West's role in them. The book requires, but repays, readers' full attention.

Smith, Daniel Blake. *An American Betrayal: Cherokee Patriots and the Trail of Tears*. Henry Holt, 2011. President Jackson never looked worse than in his ruthless eviction of the Cherokee from their ancestral homes.

Starr, Kevin. *Americans and the California Dream: 1850–1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. This book is a rich and detailed labor of love. Starr himself is one of the very best state historians, telling an epic tale on the appropriate scale.

Stegner, Wallace. *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954. A great novelist writes a great biography of the Western geologist, explorer, and ethnologist.

Stratton, Joanna. *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier*. New York: Simon and Schuster Touchstone, 1981. In the 1980s, Stratton, a young graduate student. found in her grandmother's Kansas attic a great trove of women's stories from the state's frontier era.

Twain, Mark. *Roughing It*. New York: Signet Classics, 2008. The young novelist's account of his trip to the California frontier in 1861, including a hilarious visit to Brigham Young's Salt Lake City.

Tweton, D. Jerome, and Theodore Jelliff. *North Dakota: The Heritage of a People*. Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1983.

Webb, Walter Prescott. *The Great Plains*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. For decades, this was the go-to account of plains history. Now outdated and widely criticized, it still repays careful attention because of the sheer volume of information it contains, despite its interpretive quirks.

Wheelan, Joseph. *Invading Mexico: America's Continental Dream and the Mexican War, 1846–1848*. Carroll and Graf, 2007. How notions like Manifest Destiny turned the United States from a regional, rural republic into the beginnings of a superpower.

White, Richard. *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*. New York: Norton, 2012. The villains take center stage in White's unsentimental account of the big railroads. His work is the antidote to patriotic effusions.

———. *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. White is one of the two or three leading historians of the environment and the West. Bursting with good ideas and common sense, this book is strongly recommended to anyone who's only going to read one book about the West.

Wills, Garry. *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. American polymath and intellectual superstar

turns his laser gaze on the film icon and explains why he was the perfect Western film hero.

Worster, Donald. *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. Mournful but insightful account from an engaged environmental scholar of predatory capitalism and the misuse of resources.

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