Settling the Western Frontier

1860-1890
America Moves West

- America’s desire to expand meant that thousands would migrate to western lands (Manifest Destiny).
- What are some pull factors?
- What are some push factors?
MANIFEST DESTINY

- Oregon Territory
- Area ceded by Britain in 1818
- Mexican Cession
- Louisiana Purchase
- United States 1783
- Texas
- Gadsden Purchase
- Florida
- Pacific Ocean
- Atlantic Ocean
The Frontier

• The frontier is the region that forms the margin (edge) of settled territory.
The Great Plains

• In the 19th century, the Great Plains were the frontier of America.

• The Great Plains are an expanse of flat grasslands located between the Mississippi River and Rocky Mountains.

http://www.gpnps.org/great_plains_map_l.gif
Five Groups on the Frontier

Who were they?
• 1. Railroad Builders
• 2. Miners
• 3. Ranchers/ Cowboys
• 4. Farmers/ Homesteaders
• 5. Native Americans

Main Ideas:
• As these groups moved West, they adapted to their environment in order to improve their standard of living.
• They came into conflict with each other as they competed for limited resources in the West.
Group 1: Railroads

• The government wanted Western settlement.
• Infrastructure –
  – basic structure required for a country to function (transportation, communications, etc.)
• Improving railroads meant improving infrastructure.
Group 1: Railroads

- Pacific Railway Act (1862)- Government aided the construction of a railroad and telegraph line
  - Providing loans
  - Providing land grants

railroad supports economic development of West.

- Railroad companies sold land along the rail lines at low prices;
  - encouraged the growth of towns.
Problems Building the Railroad

- Joining tracks of different sizes
- Mountains
- Waterways
- Inclement Weather
Building the Railroad

- Irish and Chinese immigrants, freed slaves, and other discriminated-against groups took the dangerous job of building the railroad.

- Thousands died due to explosions, disease, exposure, and other reasons.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/iron/teachers.html
The Transcontinental Railroad crossed the continent - decreased travel time from coast to coast.

The Central Pacific Railroad started in Sacramento and built eastward.

The Union Pacific Railroad started at the Missouri River and built westward.

completed at Promontory Point, Utah in 1869.
The Golden Spike
Promontory Point, Utah  1869

[Image of the Golden Spike ceremony at Promontory Point, Utah in 1869]
The Transcontinental Railroad

The railroad joined the country together.

Because it made transportation easier, America saw population growth in the West.

Also resulted in a wider variety of consumer goods becoming available.

It helped close the Western Frontier.
Processing Questions

1. How did the government support the building of the railroad?

2. Which groups primarily built the railroad?

3. How did the railroad impact migration and settlement of the American West?

4. How did the economic impact of the Transcontinental Railroad contribute to the close of the frontier?
Group 2: Miners

- When gold, silver, and other metals were found, thousands rushed west to try and get rich.
- The West’s deposits helped growing industry in the East.
- Miners were among the first settlers that populated Western territories.
Boom Towns and Ghost Towns

- **Boom Town**- Town with rapid population growth, usually as thousands rushed to the newest discovery almost overnight.

- **Ghost Town**- Town with rapid population decline. As the gold or silver ran out, people left as quickly as they had come.
Photos from Gleeson, a silver mining ghost town in Southeast Arizona. These buildings were once the hospital (left) and the local school (right) in a boom town.
Klondike Gold Rush

• Sometimes called the Yukon Gold Rush
• Gold was discovered in Canada (near Alaska) in 1896,
• Thousands used this to escape the economic difficulties they were facing in the US at that time.

Men waiting to register their claims.
Processing Questions

5. Describe the boom and bust cycle that was associated with western mining.

6. How did geography affect people who participated in the Klondike Gold Rush?

The Chilkoot Trail, also known as the “Golden Stairs”
Group 3: Ranchers/ Cowboys

People in Eastern urban areas wanted beef, but Western rural areas had the wide open spaces for raising the cattle.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas_Longhorn
Cattle Industry Boom

• Long Drive (Cattle Drive)- movement of cattle herds from grazing lands to railroad terminals.

• Railroads made it easier to get cattle to market, but they were expensive.

• As railroads expanded, it meant less space for grazing.
7. Why did the cattle industry boom in the late 1800s?

8. How did the railroad both benefit and hurt ranchers?
Group 4: Farmers/ Homesteaders

- **Homestead Act (1862)**- Government gave away land in order to encourage rapid settlement of the Great Plains.- **paid $10 for 160 acres, must live there for 5 yrs.**
- It resulted in thousands moving west to become farmers.
Problems for Homesteaders

1. Lack of rainfall/water
2. Lack of trees/lumber (wood)
3. Buffalo/ American Indians
4. Inclement weather
5. Prairie grass/ Difficulties planting/ Fires
6. Loneliness/ Lack of near neighbors

In order to deal with these problems, homesteaders became very resourceful.

They developed new ways of living and farming to improve their standard of living.
Adapting to Homestead Life

Soddies- Homes built of sod bricks (prairie grass & dirt)
Dugouts- Homes built in the hillside
They burned cow and buffalo chips for fuel.
New Farming Methods/ Technology

- Dry planting
- Plows
- Tractors
- Bonanza farms
- Threshing machines
- Barbed wire - led to enclosure of fields and end of the open range.
CONFLICTS:

• New technology led to overproduction of crops.
• Railroads took advantage of farmers by charging high shipping rates.
• Range Wars erupted (conflicts between farmers and ranchers).
• Frustration over these things led to the creation of a new political party, the Populist Party.
Processing Questions


10. What is the effect of the Homestead Act?

11. Describe the conflict between farmers and ranchers and how the conflict was addressed.

12. Describe the conflict between farmers and railroads and how the conflict was addressed.
Group 5: Native Americans

• The Plains Indians
  – nomadic lifestyle.
  – depended on the buffalo for food, fuel, and clothing.

• The railroad, homesteaders, ranchers, and miners often came into conflict with the Indians over the land and resources.
Group 5: Native Americans

• **Assimilation**: Many wanted the Indians to give up their culture and become like the white settlers.

• **Dawes Act (1877)**- Intended to “Americanize” or assimilate the Indians by giving reservation land to individual owners. Wanted to contain the Native Americans and stop them from being nomadic.
The Indian Wars

• Treaties made with the Indians were often ignored by ranchers, miners, and farmers and conflicts erupted.

• Two Key Battles:
  – Battle of Little Bighorn
  – Battle of Wounded Knee
Processing Questions

13. What was the government’s attitude toward Native Americans?

14. What was the purpose of the Dawes Act?
Communication

During the settlement of the West, both the telegraph and telephone were developed. The telegraph made communication across the country quicker and easier.
Expanding Infrastructure

The postal service improved as the frontier grew, eventually making mail service available to Western settlers.

Newspapers also helped bring the country together.
Summarizing

How do you think Western Settlement affected the physical environment (How did it impact the land itself)?

- Mining industry cut down forests
- Farmers changed environment of Great Plains
Summarizing

How did Western settlement improve technology and the standard of living?

• It improved infrastructure
• Expansion of railroad increased availability and variety of consumer goods
• Communication improved with Western settlement
Closing of the Frontier

• In 1890, the Census Bureau declared that the frontier was closed.

• Most of the land in the West was now settled in some way - individuals lived on it, or it was owned by the railroads or other corporations.

• Although people continued to migrate West, the great era of settlement - and resettlement of the Native Americans - was over.

• Do any frontiers exist today?
Settling the West and Closing the Frontier

Positive Impact
• New technology/innovations created
• Improved standard of living
• Homestead Act provided land for many who might not otherwise have been landowners
• The Transcontinental Railroad significantly improved transportation

Negative Impact
• Conflict between groups in the West
• Barbed wire and the railroad brought the open range to an end- bad for cowboys and ranchers
• The mining industry damaged the land and the forests.
15. How did the telegraph affect the standard of living in the U.S.?

16. How did the railroad improve the standard of living in the U.S.?
MORRILL LAND GRANT ACT- 1862

• It committed the Federal Government to grant each state 30,000 acres of public land and laid the foundation for a national system of state colleges and universities. Put in effect by Abraham Lincoln.

Justin Smith Morrill