**Unit 11: The Gilded Age: Chapter 13: Settling the West**

**I. Growth of the Mining Industry**

**A.** The growing industries in the East needed the West’s rich deposits of gold, silver, and copper. These deposits brought settlers to the West’s mountain states.

**B.** Prospectors used simple equipment like picks, shovels, and pans to mine the shallow deposits of ore by hand. This process is known as **placer mining.** Corporations dug deep beneath the surface to mine the deposits of ore in a process known as **quartz** **mining.**

**C.** In 1859 prospector **Henry Comstock** staked a claim for a silver mine in Six-Mile Canyon, Nevada. This caused Virginia City, Nevada, to go from an outpost to a boomtown almost overnight. Several years later, the mines ran out of silver and the boomtown became a ghost town. The cycle of boom and bust was repeated throughout the mountainous West.

**D.** During boom times, crime was a serious problem. **Vigilance committees** formed to track down and punish wrongdoers.

**E.** Mining helped the growth of Colorado, the Dakota Territory, and Montana. Mining in Colorado spurred the building of railroads through the Rocky Mountains. Denver became the supply point for the mining areas and the second largest city in the West after San Francisco.

**II. Ranching and Cattle Drives**

**A.** After the Civil War, many Americans began building large cattle ranches on the Great Plains. The Texas longhorn was a breed of cattle that could survive the harsh climate of the plains.

**B.** The cattle ranching industry grew in part because of the **open range**—vast areas of grasslands owned by the federal government. Cattle raisers could graze their herds free of charge and without boundaries.

**C.** During the Civil War, large numbers of eastern cattle were slaughtered to feed the Union and Confederate armies. After the war, beef prices soared. This made it worthwhile to round up the longhorns.

**D.** The first **long drive** in 1866 across the Great Plains to the railroad in Sedalia, Missouri, proved that cattle could be driven north to the rail lines and sold for 10 times the price they could get in Texas.

**E.** The major route for moving cattle was the **Chisholm Trail** that went from Texas to Abilene, Kansas.

**F.** A long drive began with the spring roundup to collect cattle from the open range. The cattle were divided and branded. Then cowboys moved the herds of cattle along the trails to the rail lines. Most cowboys were former Confederate army soldiers, a few were Hispanic, and many were African American.

**G.** The long cattle drives ended, in part, when the open range was largely fenced off with **barbed wire.** Investors from the East and from Britain put money into the cattle business, causing an oversupply of animals on the market. Prices for cattle greatly dropped. Many ranchers went bankrupt. Also, the harsh winters of 1886–1887 killed many cattle.

**I. Geography of the Plains**

**A.** The **Great Plains** region extends westward to the Rocky Mountains from around the 100th meridian—an imaginary line running north and south from the central Dakotas through western Texas.

**B.** Rainfall on the Great Plains averages less than 20 inches per year. Trees only grow naturally along rivers and streams and on hilltops.

**C.** Huge herds of buffalo once grazed on the prairie grasses of the Great Plains.

**D.** Major **Stephen Long** explored the Great Plains with an army expedition in 1819. He called it the “Great American Desert” and said it was almost entirely unfit for farming.

**II. The Beginnings of Settlement**

**A.** Railroads provided easy access to the Great Plains. Railroad companies sold land along the rail lines at low prices and provided credit.

**B.** The federal government helped settle the Great Plains by passing the **Homestead Act** in 1862. For $10, a settler could file for a **homestead,** or a tract of public land availablefor settlement. The homesteader could get up to 160 acres of public land and couldreceive title of it after living there five years.

**C.** Settlers on the Plains found life very difficult. The environment was harsh, with summer temperatures soaring over 100°F and winter bringing blizzards and extreme cold. Prairie fires and swarms of grasshoppers were a danger and a threat.

**III. The Wheat Belt**

**A.** Many inventions and new farming methods made farming on the Great Plains very profitable.

**B.** Farmers on the Great Plains used the **dry farming** method—planting seeds deep in the ground where there was enough moisture for them to grow.

**C.** By the 1860s, farmers on the Great Plains were using newly designed steel plows, seed drills, reapers, and threshing machines. These machines made dry farming possible. Farmers could work large tracts of land with the machines.

**D.** Farmers who plowed the soil on the Great Plains were called **sodbusters.** Many of them lost their homesteads because of drought, wind erosion, and overuse of the land.

**E.** During the 1860s and 1870s, new technology, such as the mechanical reapers and binders and threshing machines, made farming more profitable. The innovations were also well suited for harvesting wheat.

**F.** Wheat withstood drought better than other crops, so it became the most important crop on the Great Plains. Wheat farmers from Minnesota and other Midwestern states moved to the Great Plains in large numbers to take advantage of the inexpensive land and the new farming technology. The **Wheat Belt** began at the eastern edge of the Great Plains and included much of the Dakotas and the western parts of Nebraska and Kansas.

**G.** Some wheat farms, called **bonanza farms,** were much larger than single-family farms and covered up to 50,000 acres. These farms often brought the owners large profits.

**H.** Several events caused Great Plains farmers to fall on hard times. In the 1890s, a glut of wheat caused prices to drop. Some farmers lost their land because they could not repay bank loans they had taken out. A prolonged drought that began in the 1880s destroyed crops and farms, forcing some farmers to return to the East.

**IV. Closing the Frontier**

**A.** On April 22, 1889, the government opened for settlement the land that later became the state of Oklahoma. Within hours 10,000 people raced to stake claims in an event known as the Oklahoma Land Rush.

**B.** In 1890 the Census Bureau reported that the frontier was closing. This news concerned those who believed that land at the frontier provided a place for Americans to make a fresh start.

**C.** Many settlers in the Great Plains did make a fresh start. They adapted to the environment by getting water from deep wells and getting supplies and building materials that the railroads had shipped.

**I. Culture of the Plains Indians**

**A.** Some Native American nations of the Great Plains lived in communities and farmed and hunted. Most Native Americans of the Great Plains were **nomads** who moved from place to place in search of food. They followed the herds of buffalo.

**B.** Native American groups of the Great Plains had several things in common. They lived in extended family networks and had a close relationship with nature. They were divided into bands with a governing council. Most Native American groups practiced a religion based on a belief in the spiritual power of the natural world.

**II. Cultures Under Pressure**

**A.** Native Americans had been under pressure for years from advancing white settlement. In 1862 the Sioux in Minnesota launched a major uprising.

**B.** The Dakota Sioux agreed to live on a small reservation in Minnesota, in exchange for **annuities** paid by the federal government to the reservation dwellers. The annuities were very small and often taken from them by American traders. In 1862 Congress delayed payments of the annuities. Some Sioux began starving. Chief **Little Crow** asked traders to give his people food on credit. His request was denied. The Dakota began an uprising that led to the deaths of hundreds of settlers.

**C.** The U.S. army sent patrols into the northern Great Plains to prevent further uprisings among the Sioux there. The Lakota Sioux were nomads who feared losing their hunting grounds. In December 1866, Chief Red Cloud’s forces defeated a U.S. army detachment in Montana in what is called **Fetterman’s Massacre.**

**D.** In the 1860s, tensions between the Cheyenne and Arapaho Native Americans and the miners in Colorado increased. Bands of Native Americans attacked wagon trains and ranches in Colorado. The territorial governor ordered the Native Americans to peacefully surrender at Fort Lyon. Chief Black Kettle brought hundreds of Cheyenne to the fort to negotiate. Instead of negotiating peace with the Cheyenne, the U.S. army attacked them in what has become known as the **Sand Creek Massacre.**

**E.** In 1867 Congress formed an **Indian Peace Commission,** which proposed creating two large reservations on the Plains. The Bureau of Indian Affairs would run the reservations. The U.S. army would deal with any groups that did not report to or remain on the reservations.

**F.** This plan was doomed to failure. Signing treaties did not ensure that the government or Native Americans would abide by their terms.

**III. The Last Native American Wars**

**A.** By the 1870s, buffalo were rapidly disappearing. By 1889 very few buffalo remained. The buffalo were killed by migrants crossing the Great Plains, professional buffalo hunters who wanted their hides, sharpshooters hired by railroads, and hunters who killed them for sport.

**B.** Many Native Americans left their reservations to hunt buffalo on the open plains. In addition, when American settlers violated the treaties, the Native Americans saw no reason to abide by them.

**C.** In 1876 the Lakota left their reservation to hunt near the Bighorn Mountains in southeastern Montana. The U.S. government sent army troops after the Lakota. **George A**. **Custer,** commander of the Seventh Cavalry, divided his forces and attacked the Lakota and Cheyenne warriors camped at the Little Bighorn River. The Native Americans killed all the soldiers. Sitting Bull and his followers fled to Canada. Other Lakotas were forced to return to the reservation.

**D.** The Nez Perce, led by Chief Joseph, refused to move to a reservation in Idaho in 1877. They fled, but later were forced to surrender and move to Oklahoma.

**E.** At the Lakota Sioux reservation in 1890, the Lakota were ordered by a government agent to stop the **Ghost Dance**—a ritual that was celebrating the hope that the whites would disappear, the buffalo would return, and Native Americans would reunite with their ancestors. The dancers fled the reservation and were chased by the U.S. troops to Wounded Knee Creek. Many Lakota were killed. This was the final Native American resistance to federal authority.

**IV. Assimilation**

**A.** Some Americans had opposed the treatment of Native Americans. Some people thought that the situation between whites and Native Americans could be improved if Native Americans could **assimilate,** or be absorbed into American society as landowners and citizens. This included breaking up reservations into individual **allotments,** where Native Americans would live in families and support themselves. This became the policy when Congress passed the **Dawes Act** in 1887.

**B.** The Dawes Act was a failure. Few Native Americans had the training or enthusiasm for farming or ranching. They found the allotments too small to be profitable. Few Native Americans were willing or able to adopt the American settlers’ lifestyles in place of their own culture.