

# Chapter 16: Conquering a Continent, 1854-1890

## I. The Republican Vision

### A. Integrating the National Economy

1. Reshaping the former Confederacy after the Civil War accompanied a Republican drive to strengthen the national economy to overcome limitations of market fluctuations that took place under previous Democratic regimes.
2. Failure to fund internal improvements left different regions of the country disconnected, producing the Civil War, Republicans argued.
3. During the Civil War and after, the Republican-dominated Congress made vigorous use of federal power, passing **protective tariffs** that gave U.S. manufacturers a competitive advantage against foreign firms.
4. Republican administrations would strengthen the economy through a massive public-private partnership that modern historians argue represents a turn away from a laissez-faire or “hands off” approach of previous administrations towards the economy.
5. Railroad developments in the United States began well before the Civil War but peaked after the Civil War. By 1900, virtually no corner of the country lacked rail service.
6. Railroads transformed American capitalism by adopting a legal form of organization, the corporation, enabling them to raise private capital in large amounts.
7. Along with the transformative power of railroads, Republicans’ protective tariffs also helped build thriving U.S. industries. A Civil War debt of \$2.8 billion was erased during the 1880s by a \$2.1-billion-dollar income from tariffs.
8. Fierce tariff debates marked American politics in the 1880s and 1890s. Democrats argued that the tariff had not slowed poverty in the United States.
9. Protective tariffs had also helped to foster the growth of **trusts**, giant corporations that dominated whole sectors of the economy and wielded monopoly power.
10. The rise of railroads and trusts prompted a pushback by companies against new state and federal regulatory laws. In *Munn v. Illinois* (1877), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states possessed the right to regulate businesses, but not at the expense of fragmenting the national marketplace.
11. In the Southwest, federal courts promoted economic development at the expense of racial justice. Although the United States had taken control of New Mexico and Arizona after the U.S. Mexican War of 1848, much of the land still remained in Mexican American hands by the 1870s.
12. As the post-Civil War years brought railroads and Anglo-American settlers, Mexican Americans lost 64 percent of their lands through special courts that ruled on land titles.
13. The Santa Fe Ring was a notorious group of politicians and lawyers who conspired to defraud Mexican Americans of their lands.
14. After the Civil War, U.S. and European policymakers attempted to transform their economies to the **gold standard**. But basing money supplies on gold was a divisive issue that framed U.S. politics for a generation.
15. In 1873, Congress directed the U.S. Treasury, over a six-year period, to retire the **greenback** paper dollars issued during the Civil War and replace them with notes from an expanded system of national banks. After 1879, the Treasury exchanged notes for gold upon request.
16. Silver adherents received a modest victory when Congress passed the Bland-Allison Act of 1878, requiring the United States to coin a modest amount of silver.
17. Republican nationalist policies fostered rapid economic growth in the form of an expansion of telecommunications, corporations, and capital, making the United States a mighty industrial power by 1900.

### B. The New Union and the World

1. Following the Civil War, the United States achieved greater leverage with foreign nations like Britain. American expansionists expected to add more territories to the nation. The use of the Hawaiian Islands and the invention of steam transportation facilitated expansion off the continent to places like Japan in the 1850s.
2. Union victory also increased trade with Latin America. Mexico freed itself from French rule in 1867, but risked economic manipulation by its larger northern neighbor, the United States.
3. International trade became a new model for asserting power in Latin America and Asia. Under the leadership of Secretary of State William Steward (1861–1869), the United States embraced China and Japan, forcing the

Japanese to remain open to trade.

4. Seward also advocated the purchase of strategic locations for naval bases and refueling stations, such as land in Nicaragua for a canal, Hawaii, and the Philippines.
5. In 1868, Seward achieved a significant victory with congressional approval of the Burlingame Treaty with China, regulating immigration. The same year, Seward also purchased Alaska from Russia, further establishing the United States as a global power.

## II. Incorporating the West

### A. Cattlemen and Miners

1. Conquest and development of the American West became the domestic foundation for national supremacy in the late 1800s. Farm development was as vital as factory development to Republican policymakers.
2. Republicans sought to bring families to the West by offering 160 acres of land through the Homestead Act.
3. Innovative federal policies, such as the U.S. Geological Survey, helped in 1879 to open up western lands managed under a new Department of the Interior.
4. Federal policies helped to incorporate the trans-Mississippi West. As railroads crossed the country, thousands of homesteaders filed land claims.
5. To make room for cattle, professional buffalo hunters eliminated the buffalo.
6. Texas ranchers inaugurated the famous Long Drive, hiring cowboys to herd cattle hundreds of miles north to the railroads that pushed west across Kansas.
7. As soon as railroads reached the Texas range country during the 1870s, ranchers abandoned the Long Drive. Stockyards appeared beside railroad tracks in large Midwestern cities like Chicago. These places became the center of a new industry, meatpacking.
8. Sheep raising also became a major enterprise in the high country of the Rockies and the Sierras.
9. In the late 1850s as California gold panned out, other mineral discoveries helped to develop the Far West in places like Nevada, the Colorado Rockies, South Dakota's Black Hills, and Idaho. The Comstock Lode in Nevada was a major silver discovery.
10. At some sites, miners found copper, lead, and zinc that eastern industries demanded. The insatiable material demands of mining triggered economic growth at many far-flung sites, such as Pueblo, Colorado, which smelted ore.
11. Remote areas turned into a mob scene of prospectors, traders, gamblers, prostitutes, and saloonkeepers; prospectors made their own mining codes and often used them to exclude or discriminate against Mexicans, Chinese, and blacks.
12. California created a market for Oregon's produce and timber.

### B. Homesteaders

1. Upon first encountering the Great Plains, Euro-Americans thought the land barren, and referred to it as the **Great American Desert**.
2. Railroads, land speculators, steamship lines, and the western states and territories did all they could to encourage settlement of the Great Plains.
3. New technology – steel plows, barbed wire, and strains of hard-kernel wheat – helped settlers to overcome obstacles.
4. Between 1878 and 1886, settlers experienced exceptionally wet weather, but then the dry weather typical of the Great Plains returned, and settlers fled recently settled land.
5. “American fever” took hold in northern Europe as Norwegians and Swedes came to the United States.
6. For some southern blacks known as **Exodusters**, Kansas was the promised land; by 1880, 40,000 blacks lived in Kansas – the largest concentration of blacks in the West aside from Texas.
7. By the turn of the century, the Great Plains had fully submitted to agricultural development. In this process, there was little of the “pioneering” that Americans associated with the westward movement; farming required capital investment and the willingness to risk boom and bust cycles just like any other business.
8. Although miners, lumber workers, and cowboys were overwhelmingly men, many women accompanied families as homesteaders.
9. The Republican ideal of national economic development through farm building supported the cultural value of **domesticity**. Spread widely before and after the Civil War, domesticity held that it was a man's devotion to his wife and children that caused him to work hard and be thrifty and responsible.
10. Domesticity produced a political clash with the Mormon Church, whose adherents practiced **polygamy**.

Along with voting rights, this issue framed gender political controversies during Reconstruction.

11. Women's rights expanded when Wyoming granted women the right to vote in 1869. Towns in Kansas in the 1880s elected women as mayors and as city professionals. Women were increasingly leaving the home to work.
12. Yet the vast majority of rural women lived under harsh frontier conditions. Rolvaag's contemporary work, *Giants in the Earth* portrayed the fear and isolation of Norwegian immigrant women on the Dakota prairie.

### C. Debt and Aridity

1. Farm prices dropped in the late 1800s as technological innovation and global expansion glutted markets for wheat, cotton, and corn.
2. Farmers also faced the problem of being small producers in a marketplace that rewarded **economies of scale**, giving large corporations the advantage of undercutting farmers. In the 1880s, farmers would launch one of the most powerful protest movements in the history of American politics.
3. A hostile environment existed on the Great Plains in the form of grasshoppers, prairie fires, hailstorms, droughts, tornadoes, blizzards, the lack of water, and minimal wood supplies. Many families built homes made of sod.
4. By the late 1880s, over 50,000 homesteaders had fled the Dakotas and many others gave up their settled lands. Dry farming techniques helped to alleviate some of the challenges of Great Plains farming. But it favored the growth of large corporations. Family farms required over 300 acres to survive low prices and harsh weather conditions.
5. By 1900, about half of the nation's cattle and sheep, one-third of its cereal crops, and nearly three-fifths of its wheat came from the Great Plains. But environmental costs multiplied as wasteful anti-biodiversity agricultural practices continued.
6. Encouragement from experts like John Wesley Powell, a geologist who explored the West, to infuse federal funding into western development ignited a debate over corporate versus small family farms.
7. Rampant overdevelopment led to a preservation movement by Congress. In 1864, Congress gave 10 square miles of the Yosemite Valley to California for public use. In 1872, Congress set aside 2 million acres of Wyoming's Yellowstone Valley as a public park for tourism, a new western industry on the rise.
8. Indian eviction accompanied land preservation. In 1877, the Nez Perce under Chief Joseph and the Bannock tribe of Indians utilized Yellowstone for survival as they fled forced reservation life by the federal military.
9. The military decided that killing buffalo would help reduce resistance of the Great Plains tribes. They had signed treaties in 1867 and 1868 to cede vast tracts of land and remain on reservations. Whites now wanted Indians to cede more lands.

## III. A Harvest of Blood: Native Peoples Dispossessed

### A. The Civil War and Indians on the Plains

1. Before the Civil War, Congress gave the Great Plains to Native Americans because they thought it could not be farmed. But railroads, steel plows, and the desire for land reversed that decision.
2. The Sioux and other tribes fought against federal government attempts to place them on reservations. In 1862 in Minnesota, the Sioux responded by massacring white settlers. President Lincoln hanged the leaders and exiled the remainder from the state.
3. The Dakota Sioux uprising escalated tensions elsewhere between whites and Indians. In 1864, Col. Chivington led his troops to commit the Sand Creek Massacre of Cheyenne in eastern Colorado.
4. The Sioux and Arapaho responded with more attacks. In December of 1866, the Sioux wiped out eighty men under Captain Fetterman and successfully closed the Bozeman Trail.
5. By 1869, public opinion had turned against warfare as an effective means to subdue Indian tribes. Congressional leaders searched for other options to deal with the "Indian problem."

### B. Grant's Peace Policy

1. Christian reformers heavily influenced the Grant administration's peace policy. Reformers argued that Indians could be transformed into whites through education and religious indoctrination, particularly of Indian youth in boarding schools. The first boarding school opened at Carlisle in 1879.
2. Corruption, racism, and denominational in-fighting reduced the effectiveness of the boarding school campaign. To Indian leaders, reformers became just another interest group.
3. Indian tribes were forced by political circumstances to accommodate. In 1871, Congress abolished further treaty-making with Indian tribes.

4. The Supreme Court further eroded tribal power in *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* (1903), stating that Congress could make any policies it chose and could ignore existing treaties.
5. In *Ex Parte Crow Dog*, the Court ruled that Indians were not citizens unless approved by Congress. Indians would remain wards of the government until the 1930s.
6. Another **assimilation** measure attempted to free Indians from their tribal past, this time through land taking. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 held that all Indians would receive allotments of reservation land and the remainder would be sold to non-Indians.
7. The Bureau of Indian Affairs' carelessness, corruption, and greed doomed the act. Fifteen million surplus acres alone were taken from tribes in Indian Territory by 1894, facilitating the birth of the state of Oklahoma.
8. Before Dawes, Indians had held over 155 million acres of land; by 1900, this had dropped to 77 million. By 1934, native peoples had lost 66 percent of their allotted lands.

### C. The End of Armed Resistance

1. By 1873, only Sitting Bull, the great Lakota Sioux leader, openly refused to go to a reservation.
2. A crisis came on the northern plains in 1876 when the Sioux refused to sell the Black Hills as demanded by the federal government.
3. On June 25, 1876, George A. Custer pursued a reckless strategy and suffered annihilation by Chief Crazy Horse's Sioux and Cheyenne warriors at the Little Big Horn. This was the last victory of the Plains Indians against the U.S. Army.
4. The Apache hated their reservation, so they made life miserable for white settlers in the Southwest until their chief Geronimo was finally captured in 1886. The United States had completed its military conquest of the West.

### D. Strategies of Survival

1. Despite living on reservations and halting armed resistance, most native people continued to practice traditional languages, ceremonies, and arts.
2. Most native people also selectively adopted white ways such as use of the English language and skills such as agriculture. Most native people blended old and new ways.
3. One of the most famous native people who assimilated during this era was Dr. Charles Eastman, a Dakota Sioux boy trained in white schools to become a medical doctor.
4. The Ghost Dance movement symbolized the **syncretism**, or blending together, of white and Indian ways. The dance drew on Christian and native elements, spreading from reservation to reservation across the West and uniting Indian communities.
5. The Ghost Dance alarmed many local whites. On December 29, 1890, at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, U.S. Army soldiers massacred 150 Lakota Sioux people. The soldiers feared that the Ghost Dance would provoke war.
6. By 1890, the United States included forty states, an industrial economy that rivaled Britain and Germany, steady immigration, and inklings of becoming a major player in foreign places. A new American empire was forming abroad.