

The Frontier West



Geronimo, Apache leader (1829-1909)

I. The Struggle of the Plains Indians

- A. Over 200,000 Indians lived in the Plains following the Civil War
- B. Conflict with settlers in the East before the Civil War resulted in the removal policy which placed Indians in the trans-Mississippi west, most in Oklahoma territory.
- C. Peace Commissions (army and Indian agents) sent to meet with Plains Indians in 1867 and 1868 and promised aid and non-interference
- D. Conflicts between Indians and U.S. Army
 - 1. Chivington's Raid-1864. 450 Arapaho and Cheyenne men, women, and children killed in Colorado Territory
 - 2. Little Big Horn-1876. Gen. Custer and 264 troops killed by Sioux Indians in Montana Territory.
 - 3. Chief Joseph and Nez Perce captured by army after 1300 mile chase
 - 4. Wounded Knee-1890. 200 unarmed Sioux killed after Sitting Bull was killed.
- E. Dawes Act (1887) sought to Americanize Indians
 - 1. Reservations divided among families in 160 acre segments.
 - 2. Tribal loyalties had to be renounced to gain American citizenship

3. Between 1887 and 1934, Indians lost over half of their reservation lands to whites

II. Gold and Silver Fever

A. Strikes brought thousands of settlers

1. Gold discovered in Colorado in 1858
2. Silver discovered in Virginia City, Nevada (Comstock Lode)

B. Between 1860 and 1890, \$2 billion in gold and silver mined in the west

III. Cattle and Cowboys

A. Western lands and open range proved ideal for cattle ranching

1. Railroads opened up Eastern markets for beef
2. Texas longhorns brought in herds of 3000 cattle from Texas to railhead towns such as Abilene and Dodge City

B. Open ranged ended in 1880s

1. Harsh winters of 1885 and 1886 wiped out herds
2. Barbed wire (invented by Joseph Glidden) allowed farmers to fence range land to keep cattle from grazing

IV. Farmers on the Frontier

A. Tough life for settlers on woodless plains (sod houses)

B. Homestead Act (1862) brought settlers to west from East and Europe (basically free land of 160-acre sections)

C. Railroads established towns, sold land after huge land grants from the government

D. Last major section of the west settled with Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889.

V. Closing of the Frontier

A. 1890 census declared that the frontier was closed.

B. Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis ("The Frontier in American History") stated

1. Frontier was critical development of American democracy
2. Self-reliance and independent nature of American culture were fostered by the frontier