
CHAPTER 16

THE CONQUEST OF

THE WEST

The American Nation:
A History of the United States, 13th edition
Carnes/Garraty

THE WEST AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

- West contained several bustling cities including San Francisco, with a population approaching 250,000 in the late 1870s
 - Denver, San Antonio, and Salt Lake City were smaller but growing urban centers
- Economy was predominantly agricultural and extractive but also commercial and entering the early stages of industrial development

THE WEST AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Chinese immigration

- Beginning in 1850s, 4,000-5,000 per year as cheap labor for railroad construction
- After Burlingame Treaty of 1868 numbers doubled
- When railroads were finished, the Chinese began competing with white labor which led to a great cry of resentment on the west coast
 - Riots broke out in San Francisco in 1877
 - California constitution of 1879 denied the vote to the Chinese
- **CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT:** When Chinese immigration reached 40,000 in 1882, Congress banned further immigration for 10 years (later indefinitely extended)

THE WEST AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Large foreign born population in West

- One third of all Californians
- 40% of Nevadans
- Half of residents of Idaho and Arizona
- Large populations of Spanish-speaking Americans of Mexican origin all over the Southwest
- Chinese and Irish laborers poured into California by the thousands
- Substantial number of Germans in Texas
- Germans, Scandinavians and other Europeans were also numerous on the High Plains

THE PLAINS INDIANS

- In 1860, the survivors of most of the eastern tribes were living peacefully in Indian Territory
- In California, local tribes were decimated by gold seekers
- Elsewhere in the West, there were nearly a quarter of a million Indians
- Most important lived on High Plains
 - Possessed a generally uniform culture
 - Lived by hunting the bison which provided food, clothing, shelter, “firewood” and a religious symbol
 - Eagerly adopted cloth, metal tools, weapons and cheap decorations from whites

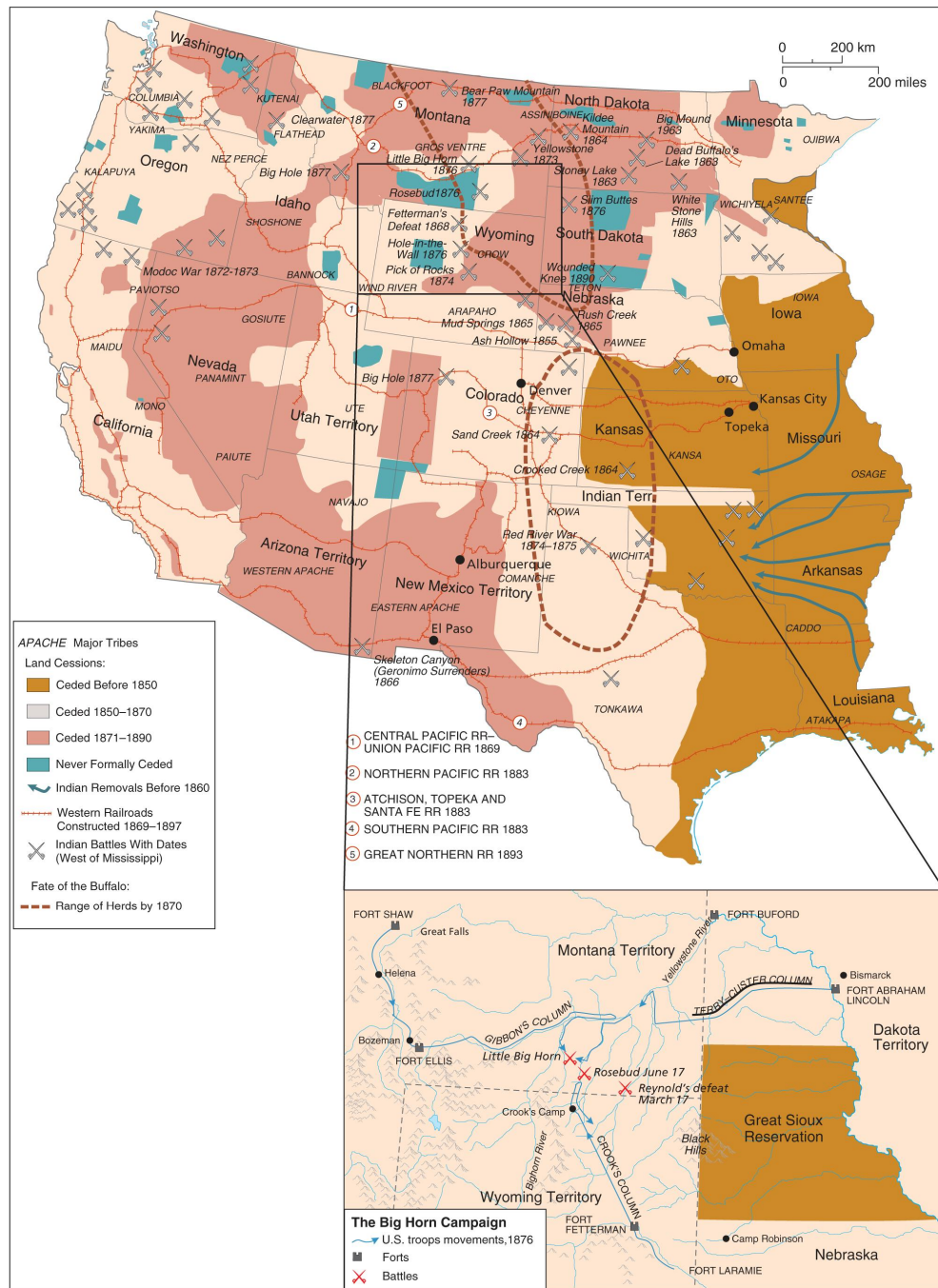
THE PLAINS INDIANS

- Previously extinct in the Western Hemisphere, the horse was reintroduced by the Spanish and had become a vital part of Plains culture by the 18th century
 - Easier to hunt buffalo
 - Easier to move around
 - More effective in fights
 - Acquire and transport more possessions
 - Increase size of tepees
- Also adopted modern weapons: cavalry sword and rifle
- Result was decrease in buffalo and increase in frequency and bloodiness of warfare



THE PLAINS INDIANS

- Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851
 - Great council of western tribes was called
 - 10,000 Indians attended
 - Thomas Fitzpatrick persuaded each tribe to accept definite limits to its hunting grounds
 - In return Indians were promised gifts and annual payments
- Policy known as “concentration” was designed to cut down on intertribal warfare and to enable the government to negotiate separately with each tribe
- Yet tribal chiefs had limited power and it was only in theory that the tribes would be treated as though they were European powers



★ Indian Wars, 1860-1890

INDIAN WARS

- Government showed little interest in honoring agreements with Indians
 - Pressured Kansas, Omaha, Pawnee and Yankton Sioux for further concessions after passage of Kansas-Nebraska Act
 - 1859 Colorado gold rush drove Cheyenne and Arapaho from land guaranteed them in 1851
- During Civil War Plains Indians rose against whites resulting in bloody guerilla warfare
 - 1864 Sand Creek Massacre of some 450 Cheyenne by Colorado Militia under Colonel Chivington
 - Indians slaughtered isolated white families, ambushed small parties, and fought troops

INDIAN WARS

- Fetterman Massacre (December 1866)
 - Oglala Sioux under Red Cloud wiped out 82 soldiers under Captain Fetterman in reaction to construction of Bozeman Trail through their main hunting grounds
- 1867: government decided to confine all Indians to two reservations, one in the Dakota Territory and one in Oklahoma, and force them to become farmers
 - At two great meetings in 1867 and 1868 at Medicine Lodge and Fort Laramie the principal chiefs yielded to the government's demands

INDIAN WARS

- Many Indians refused to abide by these agreements
- Indians made excellent guerilla fighters and were often able to stymie the military
 - Difficult to determine difference between treaty and non-treaty Indians
- After 1849, Indian affairs were overseen by the Interior Department
 - Most agents systematically cheated the Indians
 - 1869: Congress created nonpolitical Board of Indian Commissioners to oversee Indian affairs but it was generally ignored

INDIAN WARS

- 1874: gold was discovered in the Black Hills on the Sioux Reservation and thousands of miners poured in causing the Sioux to go on the warpath
 - Treaty and non-treaty Indians concentrated in the region of the Bighorn River in Montana
- Three columns of troops converged on the encampment in the summer of 1876
 - George Armstrong Custer and the 7th Cavalry were sent ahead to locate the Indians and block their escape
 - Underestimating the number of Indians, Custer chose to attack
 - His 264 men were slaughtered by 2,500 Sioux
- In autumn, short of rations and hard pressed by overwhelming numbers of soldiers, they surrendered and returned to the reservation

THE DESTRUCTION OF TRIBAL LIFE

- Fighting lessened with the coming of the transcontinental railroad and the slaughter of the buffalo
 - In mid 1860s, 13 to 15 million buffalo roamed the Plains
 - Railroads contributed to slaughter, first to feed workers, then by bringing hunters from east
 - 1871: commercial use of buffalo discovered and sealed their fate
 - In next three years 9 million were killed and after another decade, buffalo were almost extinct

THE DESTRUCTION OF TRIBAL LIFE

- By 1887: tribes of mountains and deserts beyond the Plains had also given up the fight
 - Nez Percé attempted to escape to Canada but were captured in October 1877 and settled in Oklahoma
 - Apache were last on the field with capture of leader Geronimo in 1886
- The answer to the Indian “problem” seemed to be to “civilize” the Indians

THE DESTRUCTION OF TRIBAL LIFE

DAWES SEVERALTY ACT OF 1887

- Tribal lands were to be split up into individual allotments
- Land could not be disposed of for 25 years
- Funds were to be appropriated for educating and training the Indians
- Those who accepted allotments, took up residence separate from tribes, and adopted habit of civilized life were to be granted U.S. citizenship

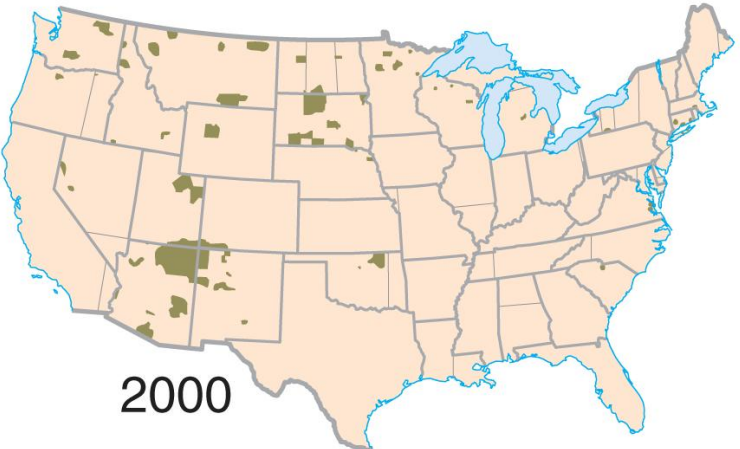
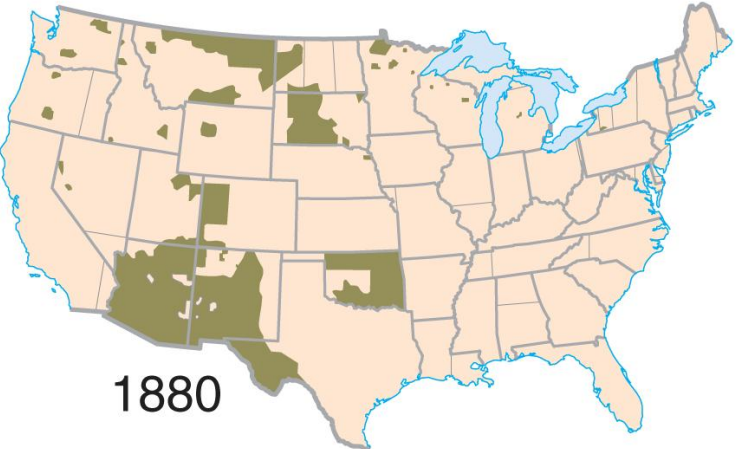
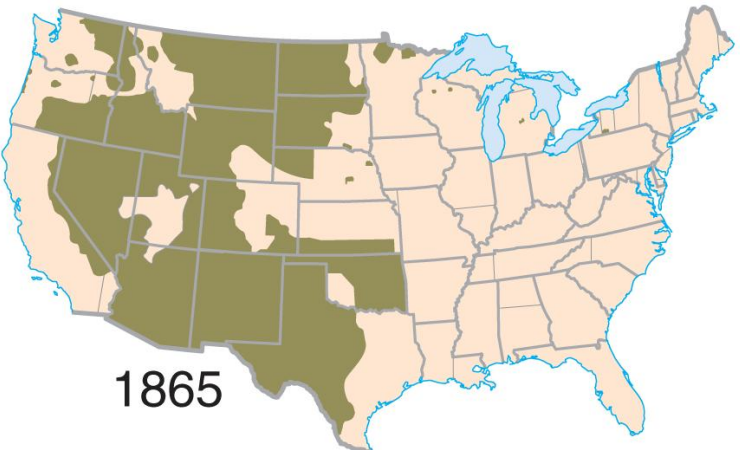
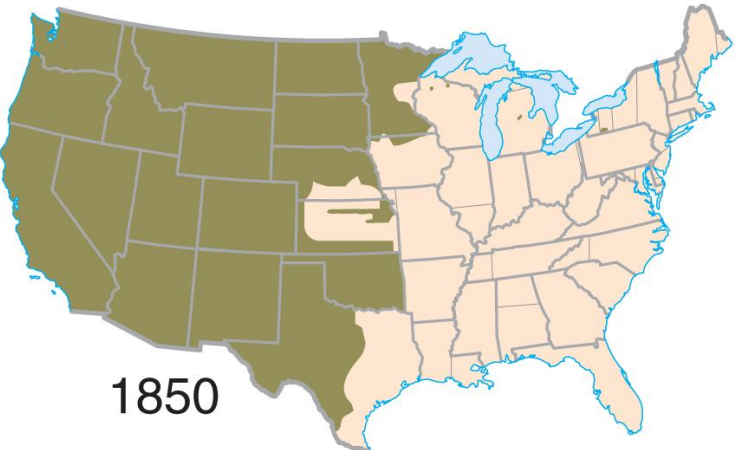
THE DESTRUCTION OF TRIBAL LIFE

EFFECTS

- Assumed Indians could be transformed into small agricultural capitalists
- Shattered what was left of Indians' culture without enabling them to adjust to white ways
- Unscrupulous white men systematically tricked Indians into leasing their lands for a pittance
- Local authorities often taxed Indian lands at excessive rates
- By 1934, Indians had lost 86 million of their 138 million acres

Land Transferred from Indians to Whites

Land Held by Indians or Returned to Indians



★ Loss of Indian Lands, 1850–2000

THE LURE OF GOLD AND SILVER IN THE WEST

- Gold and silver rushes started with a “strike” and led to thousands pouring in
 - Towns sprang up over night
 - Then high prices, low yields, hardship, violence, and deception led to an end of the boom and the death of the towns with only a very few finding wealth
- Booms
 - Spring 1858: Fraser River in Canada: led by 30,000 Californians
 - 1859: Pikes Peak in Colorado
 - June 1859: finds in Nevada, especially Comstock Lode worth \$4000 a ton
 - 1861: Idaho panhandle
 - 1862: Snake River Valley
 - 1863 and 1864: to Montana
 - 1874-1876: Black Hills in South Dakota

THE LURE OF GOLD AND SILVER IN THE WEST

- Law and order in the West was hard to come by
 - Storekeepers charged outrageous prices
 - Claim holders “salted” worthless claims
- Virginia City, Nevada
 - At its height, produced \$12 million a year in ore
 - Had 25 saloons before it had 4,000 people
 - Further finds made the future seem boundless
- But gradually mines came to be controlled by large corporations who made off with most of the wealth

THE LURE OF GOLD AND SILVER IN THE WEST

- For mines to be profitable, large capital investments were required
 - Tunnels had to be blasted into the earth
 - Heavy machinery had to be purchased and transported
 - Hundreds of skilled miners were needed (mostly “deep” miners from Cornwall, England) who had to be imported and paid
- Metal found bolstered financial position of U.S., enabling the country to pay for goods needed during the war and for postwar economic development

THE LURE OF GOLD AND SILVER IN THE WEST

- Gold and silver also caused a great increase of interest in the West
- Each new strike brought permanent settlers
- People discovered they could make more money supplying miners than mining
- Mines speeded political organization of the West



BIG BUSINESS AND THE LAND BONANZA

- While Homestead Act intended to give land free, it still cost almost \$1,000 to start a farm
- Industrial workers had neither the skills nor the inclination to become farmers
- Homesteaders usually came from districts not far removed from frontier conditions
- Despite the intent of the law, speculators often managed to obtain large tracts



BIG BUSINESS AND THE LAND BONANZA

- 160 acres was not enough for raising livestock or for the commercial agriculture occurring west of the Mississippi
 - 1873 Timber Culture Act permitted individuals to claim an additional 160 acres if they would agree to plant a quarter of it with trees within 10 years
 - Helped some farmers in Kansas, Nebraska, and Dakotas but less than 25 percent of the 245,000 who took up land under the act obtained final title

BIG BUSINESS AND THE LAND BONANZA

- Timber and Stone Act 1878 allowed anyone to acquire a quarter section of forest land for \$2.50 an acre if it was “unfit for civilization”
 - Enabled lumber companies to obtain thousands of acres
- Immediately after Civil War, Congress reserved 47.7 million acres of public land in the South for homesteaders, stopping all cash sales in the region
 - 1876: policy reversed and land thrown open
 - Between 1877 and 1888: 5.6 million acres were sold

BIG BUSINESS AND THE LAND BONANZA

- Problems with settling the Plains
 - Soil rich but climate made agriculture difficult if not impossible
 - Blizzards, floods, grasshopper plagues, and prairie fires caused repeated problems
- Bonanza farms: giant corporate controlled farms
 - Encouraged by the flat immensity of the land and newly available farm machinery
 - Could buy supplies wholesale and obtain concessions from railroads and processors
 - Most failed in the drought years of the late 1880s
- Plains still became breadbasket of America after war

WESTERN RAILROAD BUILDING

- Government subsidies of railroads further contributed to exploitation of land resources, yet grants of land seemed like a reasonable way to get railroads built and they were needed for the development of the West
 - Federal land grants to railroads began in 1850
 - Over next two decades 49 million acres were given to various lines
 - Most lavish grants went to intersectional trunk lines which received more than 155 million acres
 - 25 million reverted back to government when companies failed to lay requisite amount of track

WESTERN RAILROAD BUILDING

- 75 percent went to aid construction of 4 transcontinental railroads
 - Union Pacific-Central Pacific line from Nebraska to San Francisco completed in 1869
 - Atchinson, Topeka, and Santa Fe running from Kansas City to Los Angeles completed in 1883
 - Southern Pacific running from San Francisco to New Orleans completed in 1883
 - Northern Pacific running from Duluth, Minnesota, to Portland, Oregon, completed in 1883

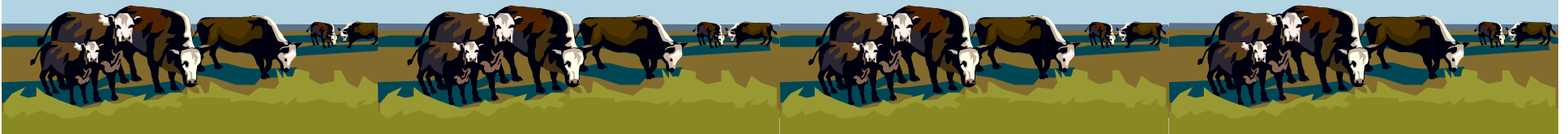
WESTERN RAILROAD BUILDING

Pacific Railway Act of 1862

- Gave the builders of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads 5 square miles of public land on each side of right of way per mile of track laid
- Land was allotted in alternate sections with the intervening sections held by the government, who did not sell land in order not to undercut the price of railroad land
- Railroads also obtained wide zone of “indemnity” land reserved to allow railroads to choose alternate sites to make up for lands settlers had already taken up
- Lands sold at prices from \$2 to \$5 per acre, garnering railroads about \$400 to \$500 million over the course of a century
- In the end, the only transcontinental railroad to survive the economic depression of the 1890s was the Great Northern which had been built without land grants and thus had been built economically

THE CATTLE KINGDOM

- By late 18th Century large herds of cattle roamed southern Texas
- These descendants of Spanish cows interbred with “English” to produce the Texas longhorn
 - While hardly the best beef cattle, they existed by the millions, largely un-owned
- Eastern urban growth combined with railroad expansion made it profitable to exploit the cattle
 - Longhorns could be had locally for \$3 to \$4 a head and sold in the east for 10 times as much



THE CATTLE KINGDOM

- Made sense to round up cattle, drive them north across federally owned land, allowing them to graze and fatten along the way, and deliver them to railroads running through Kansas
 - Between 1867 and 1872, 1.5 million cattle traveled the Chisolm Trail to Abilene, Kansas
 - 10 million were driven north until practice ended in mid-1880s

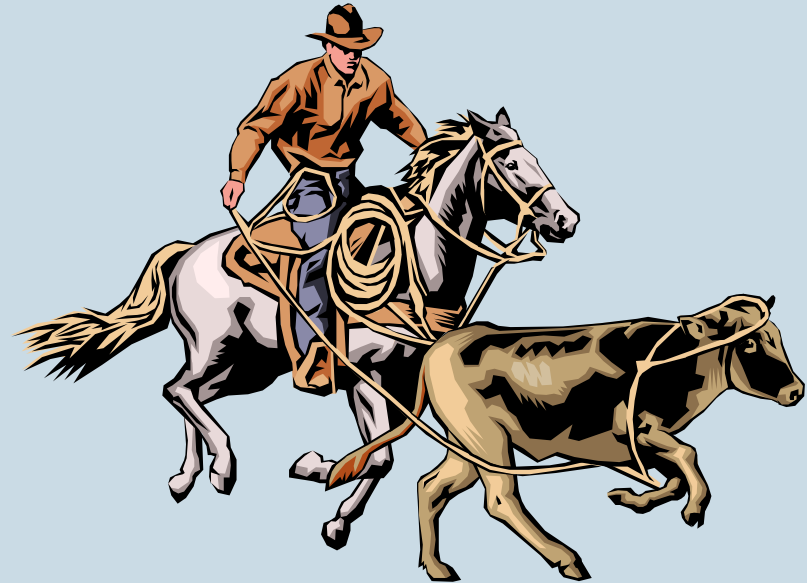




★ The West: Cattle, Railroads, and Mining, 1850–1893

OPEN-RANGE RANCHING

- Cattlemen discovered Texas cattle could survive the winters of the northern Plains
 - Introduced Hereford bulls to improve stock
 - By 1880: some 4.5 million had spread across area
 - Practiced open range ranching which required ownership of no more than a few acres along some watercourse because control of water allowed a rancher to dominate the surrounding area to the next stream



OPEN-RANGE RANCHING

- With demand for meat rising and transportation cheap, fortunes could be made in a few years
 - Capitalists from the east and Europe poured funds into the business
 - Soon large outfits dominated the business
- John Wesley Powell suggested western lands be divided into three classes:
 - Irrigable land
 - Timber land
 - Pasturage land where “farm” unit should be 2,560 acres and four of these units should be organized into “districts” in which ranchers could make own regulations about division of land, use of water, etc.

BARBED-WIRE WARFARE

- Congress refused to change the land laws, which had two bad effects:
 - Encouraged fraud
 - Desert Land Act (1877) allowed anyone to obtain 640 acres in arid states for \$1.25 an acre provided part of it was irrigated within 3 years
 - Since transfers of title were legal, cattlemen had minions buy areas then transfer the titles
 - Claimed some 2.6 million acres with probably 95 percent of claims fraudulent
 - Overcrowding became a problem that led to serious conflicts because no one had uncontested title to the land

BARBED-WIRE WARFARE

- Cattlemen formed associations and to keep other ranchers' cattle they began to fence huge areas
- Fencing made possible by 1874 invention of barbed wire by Joseph F. Glidden
- By 1880s thousands of miles of fence had been strung across the plains
 - Resulted in wars between competing interests
 - On open range, cattle could fend for themselves but barbed wire became lethal during winter storms

BARBED-WIRE WARFARE

Boom times were ending

- Overproduction drove down the price of beef
- Expenses were rising
- Many sections of the range were badly overgrazed
- Dry summer of 1886 left stock in bad shape
- Blizzard of 1886-1887 wiped out 80-90 percent of the cattle and ended open range ranching
 - Large companies went bankrupt
 - Many independent operators sold out
- In wake of blizzard, fencing continued but now ranchers only enclosed land they actually owned
 - Now brought in pedigreed bulls to improve the stock

MILESTONES

1859	Discovery of the Comstock Lode lures miners west
1864	Chivington massacre of Cheyenne
1869	Union Pacific Railroad completed Board of Indian Commissioners established
1873	Timber Culture Act encourages western forestation
1876	Sioux slaughter Custer's cavalry at Battle of Little Bighorn
1877	Desert Land Act favors ranchers U.S troops capture Chief Joseph of Nez Perce after 1,000-mile retreat
1878	Timber and Stone Act favors lumber companies
1879	Major Powell's <i>Report on the Lands of the Arid Region</i> suggests division of West
1882	Chinese Exclusion Act bans Chinese immigrant workers for ten years
1886-1887	Blizzards end open-range ranching
1887	Dawes Severalty Act splits tribal lands

WEBSITES

- Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Compiled and Edited by Charles J. Kappler (1904)

<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler>

- The Northern Great Plains, 1880-1920: Photographs from the Fred Hulstrand and F.A. Pazandak Photograph Collections

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem.award97/ndfahtml/ngphome.html>

- The Transcontinental Railroad

<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/rail.html>

- Geronimo

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- National Museum of the American Indian

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