

# Reconstruction in the West

## SECTION

# 4



TEKS 1A, 9D, 10A, 11A, 11B, 11C,  
12A, 23A, 23C, 27A, 27B, 27C, 27D

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. The U.S. government encouraged the settlement of the Great Plains.
2. Farms, ranches, and railroads were the basis of the economy that developed on the Plains.
3. Economic challenges led to the creation of farmers' political groups.
4. Native Americans and the U.S. government came into conflict over land in the West.

### The Big Idea

The Great Plains provided new opportunities for Americans but also caused conflict with Native Americans in the region.

## Key Terms and People

Homestead Act, p. 571b

Morrill Act, p. 571c

Exodusters, p. 571c

buffalo soldiers, p. 571e

Dawes General Allotment Act,  
p. 571f



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TAKING NOTES

As you read this section, take notes on the government laws and policies that affected life on the Great Plains.

## If YOU were there...

You are a female schoolteacher in Wisconsin in 1880. You live and teach in a small town, but you grew up on a farm and are used to hard work. Now you are thinking about moving West to claim free land from the government. You could teach in a school there too. You think it would be an exciting adventure, but your family is horrified that a single woman would move West on her own.

## Would you decide to become a homesteader?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** Before the Civil War, most Americans thought of the Great Plains and other western lands as the Great American Desert. But in the years following the war, the U.S. population grew and settlement spread throughout the West.

## New Lives on the Plains

The frontier changed dramatically as more and more people moved westward. Settlers built homes, fenced off land, and set up ranches and farms. Miners, ranchers, and farmers remade the landscape of the West as they adapted to their new surroundings. The geography of the West was further changed by the development and expansion of a large and successful railroad industry that moved the region's natural resources and goods to eastern markets.

In 1862 Congress passed two important land grant acts that helped open the West to settlers. The **Homestead Act** gave government-owned land to small farmers. Any adult who was a U.S. citizen or planned to become one could receive 160 acres of land. In exchange, homesteaders promised to build a house, live on the land for five years, and grow crops. After five years, the homesteader could file for his or her title to the land. Former Union soldiers could get land even more quickly. People could also buy the land after six months if they had the money to do so. The system of dividing the land into lots was the same system of townships, sections, and acres that was authorized by the Land Ordinance of 1785.

## Primary Source

### LETTER

## Letter from the Plains, 1863

In a letter to her family in Norway, immigrant Gro Svendsen describes her new life as a farmer on the plains of Iowa.

*"I remember I used to wonder when I heard that it would be impossible to keep the milk here as we did at home. Now I have learned that it is indeed impossible because of the heat here in the summer-time . . . It's difficult, too, to preserve the butter. One must pour brine [salt water] over it or salt it.*

*The thunderstorms are so violent that one might think it was the end of the world . . . Quite often the lightning strikes down both cattle and people, damages property, and splinters sturdy oak trees into many pieces."*

—quoted in *Sources in American History*

### ANALYSIS SKILL

#### ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

What might be some of the differences between Norway and Svendsen's new home in Iowa?

The **Morrill Act** granted more than 17 million acres of federal land to the states. The act required each state to sell this land and use the money to build colleges to teach agriculture and engineering. Eventually these 69 universities were the first in most western states, and still exist today. Iowa State, Purdue, and Texas A&M are all land grant colleges. In 1890 a second Morrill Act was passed that required states to also provide university facilities for African Americans. The Acts made living in western states much more attractive to people and created more educated voters and leaders.

The promise of land and a life free of discrimination drew a large number of African Americans to the West. In 1879 some 20,000

to 40,000 southern African Americans moved to Kansas. Known as **Exodusters**, these African Americans made an exodus, or mass departure, from the South. A number of black communities soon developed.

Western homesteads also were attractive to immigrants. Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, and Czech immigrants formed many small communities on the Great Plains. In addition, many single women moved west. The Homestead Act allowed unmarried women to own land, which was unusual for the time.

**READING CHECK** Analyzing Information How did the government encourage westward expansion?

## The Plains Economy

Most new residents planned to farm. But farmers from the eastern and midwestern states, as well as those from other countries, were not accustomed to the growing conditions in the Plains. Many struggled to survive. They faced unique challenges. Weather could be extreme and destroy crops. Also, the root-filled sod, or dirt, beneath the Plains grass was very tough. The hard work of breaking up the sod earned Plains farmers the nickname "sodbusters."

The cattle industry also grew rapidly. Following the Civil War, a growing economy and population created a greater demand for beef in the East. As the cattle business boomed, ranchers faced more competition for use of the open range. Farmers began to buy the rangeland on the Great Plains where cattle had once grazed freely.

## The Railroad Empire

As more Americans moved west, the need to send goods and information between the East and West increased. Some wanted to build a transcontinental railroad—a railroad that would cross the continent and connect the East to the West. To encourage construc-

tion, Congress passed the Pacific Railway Acts in 1862 and 1864. These acts gave railroad companies loans and large land grants that could be sold to pay for construction costs. Railroad companies sold this land to settlers, which encouraged people to move west.

Railroad companies also encouraged people to put their money into the railroad business, which they did—sometimes unwisely. Occasionally, companies would lie about the value of the land they sold to hopeful settlers. By the 1880s, many small western railroads were deeply in debt. Despite such setbacks, Americans remained interested in railroad investments. By 1890, there were about 164,000 more miles of track in operation than in 1865. Railroads had become one of the biggest industries in the United States.

Railroad companies offered better shipping rates to large companies, causing small farmers and businesses to complain about unfair business practices. In February 1887, Congress passed the Interstate Commerce Act, providing national regulation over trade between states and creating the Interstate Commerce Commission to ensure fair railroad rates. However, the commission lacked power to enforce its regulations.

### Farm Incomes Fall

By the 1880s mechanical farming became more common. Using machines, farmers

could work much more quickly on large fields with fewer workers. Farmers shipped their harvest east by train and from there overseas. The Great Plains became known as the breadbasket of the world.

The combination of more farms and greater productivity led to the overproduction of some crops. Overproduction resulted in lower prices. As profits decreased, many farmers found it difficult to pay bills. Farmers who could not make their mortgage payments lost their farms and homes. Many of these homeless farmers became tenant farmers who worked land owned by others. By 1880, one-fourth of all farms were rented by tenants, and the number continued to grow.

**READING CHECK** **Finding Main Ideas** What kinds of businesses supported the western economy?

## Clashes for the West

As miners and settlers began crossing the Great Plains in the mid-1800s, they pressured the federal government for more access to western lands. To protect these travelers, U.S. officials sent agents to negotiate treaties with the Plains Indians.

### The Struggle for Land

The Plains Indians lived throughout the Great Plains, from Canada south into Texas.

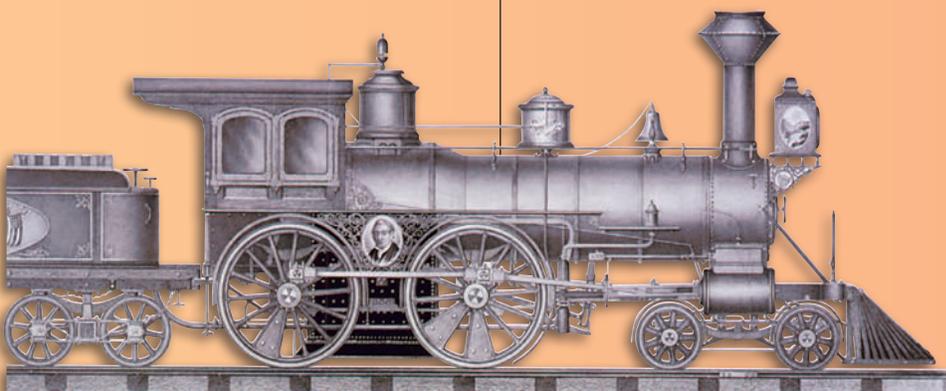
## Time Line

### Settling the West

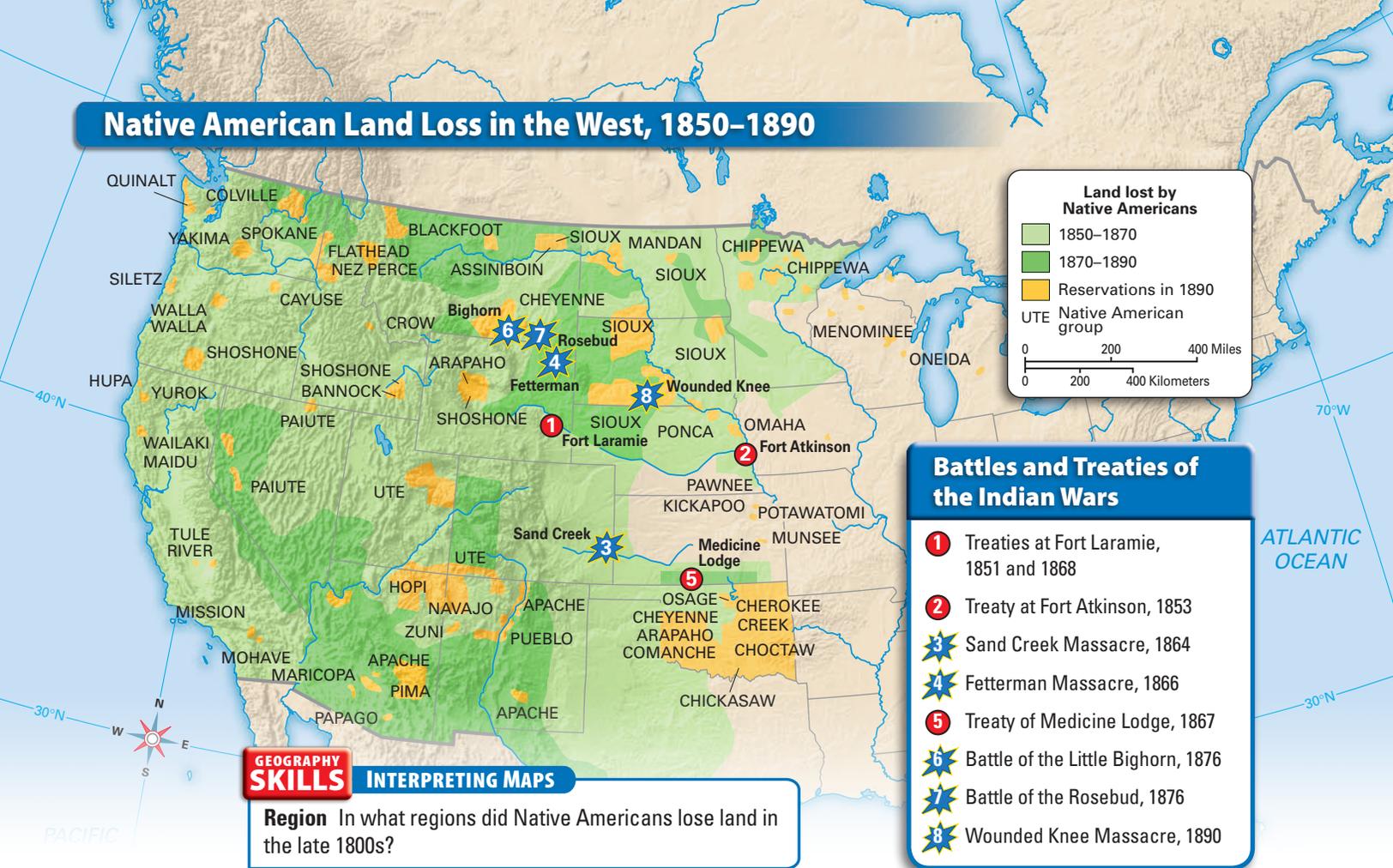
**1862** President Lincoln signs the bill that authorizes the transcontinental railroad.

**1867** The National Grange is founded.

**1879** Exodusters move to Kansas.



## Native American Land Loss in the West, 1850–1890



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLS INTERPRETING MAPS

**Region** In what regions did Native Americans lose land in the late 1800s?

- #### Battles and Treaties of the Indian Wars
- 1 Treaties at Fort Laramie, 1851 and 1868
  - 2 Treaty at Fort Atkinson, 1853
  - 3 Sand Creek Massacre, 1864
  - 4 Fetterman Massacre, 1866
  - 5 Treaty of Medicine Lodge, 1867
  - 6 Battle of the Little Bighorn, 1876
  - 7 Battle of the Rosebud, 1876
  - 8 Wounded Knee Massacre, 1890

Indian groups such as the Apache and the Comanche lived in and around Texas and what is now Oklahoma. To the north were the Sioux. These groups spoke many different languages. However, they used a common sign language to communicate, and they shared a similar lifestyle.

Miners and settlers were increasing in numbers—and they wanted Indians’ land. The U.S. government tried to avoid disputes by negotiating the treaties of Fort Laramie and Fort Atkinson, the first major treaties between the U.S. government and Plains Indians. These treaties recognized Indian claims to most of the Great Plains. They also allowed United States troops to build forts and roads and to travel across Indian homelands. The U.S. government promised to pay for any damages to Indian lands.

The treaties did not keep the peace for long. In 1858, the discovery of gold in what

is now Colorado brought thousands of miners to the West. They soon clashed with the Cheyenne and the Arapaho. In 1861, the U.S. government negotiated new treaties with Plains Indians. These treaties created reservations, areas of federal land set aside for Native Americans. The government expected Indians to stay on the reservations. This made hunting the buffalo that Plains Indians relied on almost impossible.

In the northern Plains, Southwest, and Far West, Native Americans resisted being moved to and confined on reservations. The U.S. government sent troops, including **African American cavalry—called buffalo soldiers by the Indians**—to force the Indians to leave. Battles between U.S. troops and Native Americans occurred throughout the Great Plains. Brutal attacks against each side occurred, sometimes including attacks on civilians, women, and children.

## Reforming Government Policies

By the 1870s, many Native Americans lived on reservations, where land was usually not useful for farming or buffalo hunting. Many Indians were starving. Government policies and corrupt officials kept supplies promised to the reservations from being delivered. In 1869, Ely S. Parker was appointed to head the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the first Native American to hold that post. During his two years in office, the number of incidents between U.S. Army troops and Native American groups fell.

Many social reformers believed that Native Americans should adopt the ways of white people in order to survive. Special schools were established that taught Native American children Anglo customs, sometimes against the wishes of the children's parents. In the late 1870s, a Paiute Indian named Sarah Winnemucca called for reform. She gave lectures on problems of the reservation system. In 1881, writer Helen Hunt Jackson published an influential book that pushed for reform of U.S. Indian policy.

The **Dawes General Allotment Act** of 1887 tried to lessen traditional influences on Indian society by making land ownership private rather than shared. The act also promised—but failed to deliver—U.S. citizenship to Native Americans. After breaking up reservation land and giving parcels to individuals, the government sold the remaining acreage. The Act took about two-thirds of Indian land.

## End of the Frontier

By 1870, only small portions of the Great Plains remained unsettled. For most of the next two decades, this land remained open range. In March 1889, government officials announced that homesteaders could file claims on land in what is now Oklahoma. Within a month, about 50,000 people rushed to Oklahoma to stake their claims.

In all, settlers claimed more than 2 million acres of former Indian land in the famous Oklahoma land rush and another 9 million over the next several years. This huge wave of

pioneers was the last chapter of the westward movement. By the early 1890s, the U.S. frontier had largely ceased to exist.

**READING CHECK** **Understanding Cause and Effect** How did the closing of the frontier affect Native Americans?

**SUMMARY** In this section you learned about the final stages of western settlement and how they affected Native Americans.

## Section 4 Assessment



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ONLINE QUIZ

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- Identify** What effect did the **Homestead Act** have on settlers? How was it related to the Northwest Ordinance?
  - Describe** How did the **Morrill Act** benefit settlers?
  - Draw Conclusions** Why might so many African Americans have been attracted to living in the West?
  - Describe** What ethnic groups settled in the West? Why did immigrants find the West especially hard to live in?
- Identify** Who were the sodbusters?
  - Analyze** How did railroads affect the economy of the West?
  - Evaluate** Which aspect of the western economy do you think was most important?
- Define** Who were the **buffalo soldiers**?
  - Explain** Why did U.S. troops come into conflict with Native Americans? How was the conflict resolved?
  - Identify** What were the effects of the **Dawes General Allotment Act**?

### Critical Thinking

- Finding the Main Idea** Review your notes on the U.S. policies and laws that affected settlement in the West. Then copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to rank the importance of each policy in the settlement of the West. Explain your reasons for your ranking order.

1	2	3	4
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### FOCUS ON WRITING

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- Understanding the Effects of Government Policies** Government policies affected the jobs available to people in the West. How might people have adjusted their lives to make use of the policies and laws?