

# The American West

## Lost: A Sense of Place

Among those who struggled most to adjust to changes were thousands of American Indians and Mexican Americans who had long been living in the West. Sadly, cultural clashes in the late nineteenth century would result in both groups losing a sense of place. How and why did this happen? More generally, how did the real changes occurring in the West during the Gilded Age transform America?

## Video: Conquest and Survival

American Indian choices and responses to the encroachment on their lands in the late nineteenth century resulted in rapid changes. *Conquest and Survival* presents an American Indian perspective on the conflict at Little Big Horn and the heart-breaking story of Wounded Knee as they fought to restore their pre-reservation lifestyle.

Look for answers to these questions when watching the video:

- How and why were lives of the American Indians in the West being affected by the socioeconomic transformations taking place in that region? What choices did they have in light of the conditions they faced?
- What factors led to the "Indian wars" between the 1860s and 1890? In particular, what brought U.S. troops and American Indians to the Little Bighorn River in June 1876? What happened there? What were the consequences?
- Why did Ghost Dancing become popular among Indian tribes in 1889–1890? How was Ghost Dancing connected to the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890? What happened there? What were the consequences of this massacre?

## Video script:

Music introduction

Frederick Hoxie, University of Illinois: I always think of Sarah Winnemucca, who was a Paiute

woman, who said at the beginning of her autobiography, “i was here. I remember when the white people came. They came like a lion.”

For the hunting peoples the resources went away, the buffalo and other game. Land was fenced and people were restricted from moving in ways that they had never been before. Many of them were separated from their children...tremendous health issues...problems of disease and malnutrition. And so their lives changed in almost every respect through that time period.

Narrator: As the trickle of immigrants into the West became a flood, American Indians were left with few alternatives.

Frederick Hoxie: Indians did have choices to make. Some people tried to resist the Americans and tried to stop the expansion. And still others allied themselves with the Americans because they felt the Americans were the lesser of the evils that they faced. They faced other tribes who they thought were more threatening at that particular moment than whites were.

Narrator: The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie had designated the Black Hills of South Dakota as part of the great Sioux reservation. However, as the westward construction of the railroad approached and gold was discovered in the Black Hills, the terms of the treaty gave way under the pressure of white expansion.

Frederick Hoxie: There were several bands of Sioux, all of whom opposed the invasion of the Black Hills. They all considered the Black Hills a sacred place. The government announced that all of the Sioux were to report to their agencies and were no longer allowed to hunt, as the treaty had guaranteed that they could. Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse in particular rejected that.

Narrator: In June of 1876, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer led the two hundred men of the 7th Cavalry, along with Crow and Ricara scouts, to force the Sioux back to their agency. The Sioux and other tribes, numbering 4,000 strong, were camped along the little Big Horn River.

Frederick Hoxie: The Americans attacked them, rode directly into their village. They were turned back. They retreated up the hillside. They were surrounded by warriors and they were all killed.

Gerard Baker, Mt. Rushmore National Memorial: It's a bittersweet experience even today when you go to Little Big Horn, from an Indian perspective, because it represents the last stronghold that we had, if you will. Even though we won that particular battle, as the owl would say, we lost the war.

Narrator: The battle of Little Big Horn was a great military victory for the plains Indians, but it proved to be one of their last. The U.S. army was relentless in its pursuit of those who tried to remain free.

Gerard Baker: We had two choices. You either go with the government or you became a hostile and be killed. And that seems a little harsh but that was reality. We had borders; we had boundaries that we had to remain within. I think the old-timers that first came on the reservation in that time period never did adjust and that's what killed them, I believe.

Actor as Chief Joseph: You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented when penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases.

Frederick Hoxie: In 1889 a man named Wovoka, who was a Paiute in Nevada, had a vision which said that if people would dance and follow his teachings that there would be peace and perhaps there would be some restoration of their earlier life, their pre-reservation life.

Chanting

Frederick Hoxie: It was called the ghost dance and it brought people together to dance, to sing, to celebrate, as a source of unity but also with some hope as well.

Gerard Baker: They would dance and go in these trances. They would see these things. They would see their loved ones coming back. They would see maybe visions of bison coming back. That scared the government. That scared white people actually. They could see them gaining strength with this. And that's why they stopped it, basically.

Frederick Hoxie: You had a new religious movement that was expanding across the reservation. Unfortunately, at Pine Ridge you had a newly appointed agent who was very fearful of an uprising, who had all sorts of wild ideas about Indians, and who essentially panicked and called for the army to come.

Actor, Dr. Daniel Royer: Indians are dancing and are wild and crazy. We need protection and we need it now. Nothing short of a thousand troops will stop this...dancing.

Frederick Hoxie: Within a few days, an army unit arrived and, of course, this just raised the tension level. The agent at the standing rock Sioux reservation, which was the home of Sitting

Bull, was afraid that Sitting Bull might lead some kind of an uprising and so he dispatched policemen to arrest Sitting Bull. They tried to come and take him before dawn in his cabin. He stood up, pulled away, and he was killed, shot down. This then set off even more panic among other leaders of other reservation communities in this area. Bigfoot feared that he too would be arrested and so he led his band from Cheyenne River south to Pine Ridge where he thought he'd be safe. On the night of December 28, 1890, they met a troop of soldiers who told them that if they would camp at Wounded Knee Creek, they would be safe.

In the course of the evening, the U.S. army troops took up positions on the hills surrounding this depression, this low area along the creek bed, and the next morning announced that they would all be required to give up their weapons. In the course of disarming this troop, one man resisted. A shot was fired and before anyone could say anything, pandemonium broke out.

Gunshots

Frederick Hoxie: Within a few minutes the battlefield essentially was filled with bodies of Sioux people.

Gerard Baker: And it was devastating to understand that the women and children were killed and old people that were sick were killed with no concern over their humanism. It's a very bitter story.

Frederick Hoxie: Charles Eastman was an educated Sioux physician and he said in his autobiography, "The events of Wounded Knee were deeply disappointing to someone who had put his trust in civilization." I think Wounded Knee broke his heart and I think for many Indian people this was such a crime and such a terrible act of violence that it was something that they really never forgot.

Actor, Black Elk: The nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

End of video.

## **Video: A Sense of Place**

### **Hopi Petition**

With the closing of the western frontier in the late 1800s, U.S. Indian policy shifted from conquest to assimilation. Some aspects of assimilation, with the notable exception of boarding schools, were of interest to American Indians. *A Sense of Place* analyzes the effects of the federal government's policies promoting assimilation of American Indians in the late nineteenth century. Vine Deloria Jr. contributes to the Indian perspective.

Look for answers to these questions when watching the video:

- Generally, how did Indians view assimilation in the late nineteenth century? Why was Christianity attractive to some Indians? Why did the government subsidize missionaries?
- What was the purpose of Indian boarding schools? What happened at these schools? What were the consequences?
- Why was the Dawes Act passed? What were its results?

### **Video script:**

Music introduction

Narrator: the age-old U.S. campaign of conquest and removal was complete. Now various factions in the United States sought to influence a new American Indian policy of assimilation.

Actor, Richard Henry Pratt: The sooner all tribal relations are broken up, the sooner the Indian loses all his Indian ways, even his language, the better it will be for him and for the government and greater will be the economy for both.

Frederick Hoxie: From the Indian perspective, most of this sounded crazy. Why not live the way you had always lived? But they also understood very clearly that this was a time of intense change. So there was also a Native American interest, not necessarily in assimilation, but in figuring out what they could use from this new culture. New skills – farming made sense to a lot of people. We couldn't hunt anymore, why not farm? Having your children learn to speak English, Christianity made some sense to people.

Vine Deloria, Jr.: My great-grandfather insisted that my grandfather consider Christianity and this was kind of a radical switch because he was one of the primary medicine men. My grandfather, according to the story, went...kept going to this mission church to hear the music and that seems to have been the motivation for a lot of Indians to at least consider Christianity, if not be converted. They loved the hymns.

Hymn: *All to Jesus, I surrender, Lord I give....*

Frederick Hoxie: The Bureau of Indian Affairs was not shy about joining forces with missionaries, even though there is this division of church and state in the American tradition. They quite easily and freely used government money to subsidize missionaries.

Narrator: In addition to suppressing Indian religion, assimilation policy also sought to re-educate Indian youth.

Frederick Hoxie: Boarding school policy really can be summarized by the slogan, "Kill the Indian, save the man." The idea was that if they would all be forced through a very rigid schedule every day, that they would absorb this schedule and that they would become civilized people.

Vine Deloria, Jr.: My grandfather lived a pretty free life and young men used to almost always be bare from the waist up. And when they weren't out doing things, they were walking around barefoot. He goes to Minnesota and they put him in a woolen uniform with shoes and the whole thing. And he lasted, I think, close to two years, but his health broke down because he wasn't used to that kind of life. These kids would all be packed off to Carlisle. A lot of them would die out of sheer fright and loneliness.

Narrator: The cornerstone of assimilation policy focused on land ownership. The reformers who influenced Indian policy believed that private property and individualism formed the heart of civilization. They argued that reservations should be split up and the tribal lands allotted to individuals. And in 1887 the government moved ahead with the new policy outlined by the Dawes Act.

Frederick Hoxie: The reservations were systematically surveyed. People were assigned to individual plots of land. The so-called surplus was sold or opened to white homesteaders and Indians tried to make a living on this small piece of land. In the process of this allotment effort, Indians collectively lost about 90 million acres worth of land.

Frederick Hoxie: Any possibility of them being economically viable went out the window, because you couldn't manage this land collectively. You couldn't run it efficiently with these tiny plots of land.

Vine Deloria, Jr.: Starvation, loss of community, loss of land, loss of religion. It's amazing that as many survived into the 20th century as did.

End of video.

## **Video: Mexican American Displacement**

Mexican Americans in the West in the late nineteenth century lost title to vast amounts of land. This video analyzes how and why Mexican Americans were displaced from their land holdings in the Southwest, the effects of this displacement, and the responses to it by Mexican Americans.

Look for answers to these questions when watching the video:

- How and why did so much land in the West change ownership from Mexican Americans to Anglo-Americans during this era? What were the consequences for Mexican Americans of the decline in their land ownership?
- How did Mexican Americans cope with the conditions they faced? How and why did they form a uniquely Mexican American identity?

### **Video script:**

Music introduction

Narrator: Like American Indians, Mexican-Americans also found themselves in the path of the stampede of Anglos intent on settling in the west. The Southwestern United States had, until recently, been part of Mexico.

Patty Limerick, University of Colorado: As of 1848, people who were before that Mexican citizens are rendered into American citizens. And there are guarantees offered about their retention of their land and their full rights to citizenship. Those guarantees take a beating in the

years after that.

Narrator: Throughout the Southwest, the late 19th century witnessed a huge transfer of land from Mexican-American to Anglo-American ownership.

Yolanda Romero, North Lake College: What happens is that many of the Mexican descent individuals had grants that had been given to them by the Spanish. And so, when the Americans come in, many of them basically said, well this was Spanish and, you know, it doesn't matter to us what the Spanish government did for you.

Edward Archuleta: My family's been in New Mexico since 1598. Because my family's been in the state for so long, they were able to acquire quite a bit of land over the centuries. Some of the land grants were recognized by the U.S. government, but some of them weren't. But when the American government came in, they wanted to see it on paper. They said, "Well, where are the documents? We want to see them." They didn't have them anymore. They had lost them over hundreds of years, so the American government said, "Well, if you can't prove that on paper, then it's no longer yours. You're going to have to leave."

Narrator: Land constituted the basis of wealth and position, and the vast losses sustained by the Hispanic population permanently altered the class structure of Southwestern society. In 1850, the rural Mexican population in Texas was roughly equally distributed among ranch or farm owners, skilled laborers, and manual laborers. Fifty years later, the manual laboring class had ballooned to more than two-thirds of the Texas Mexican population.

Deena Gonzalez, Loyola Marymount University: What the resulting decline in land ownership did was, it really made people of Mexican origin dependent on wages. The number of people who go to work for the railroad, for the large farming concerns, for the cattle ranches, for the small businesses in metropolitan areas of the southwest, grows. But we also know that land is critical to a sense of place and so that when people lose the base they identified as their home or their place of origin, they become more readily available as a migrating labor force. So that people can move to Chicago, to Pennsylvania to work the steel mines, for example. They can follow the routes of the crops. They're more easily displaced. They're more easily used by the economic system.

Narrator: To strengthen this economic hierarchy, Anglos invoked a mythology similar to that which had been used to justify slavery.

Actor, Mine Owner Sylvester Mowry: The lower class of Mexicans are docile, faithful, good servants, capable of strong attachments when firmly and kindly treated. They've been 'peons' for generations. They will always remain so, as it is their natural condition.

Narrator: But people of Mexican origin defied these stereotypes of docility and submissiveness. Mine workers, farm workers and construction workers repeatedly went out on strike, demanding better wages and working conditions. Across the Southwest benevolent societies arose to help one another with community needs. They served to reinforce cultural ties to the mother country, while at the same time providing support and infrastructure for an emerging, uniquely Mexican-American identity.

Deena Gonzalez: So people began to think of themselves as belonging in two worlds – in their own world, but then either in the world of the U.S. or in the world of Mexico. And people seem actually pretty comfortable in that coexistence.

Edward Archuleta: But they adapted. They had to adapt, to survive, to the new culture. Then they became urbanized and Americanized like most everybody else just to survive.

End of video.

### **Activity: Check Your Understanding**

This self-check quiz covers aspects of Native American and Mexican American life during the late nineteenth century. At the Little Bighorn River in Montana in June 1876, Sioux Indians defeated federal troops led by General George Custer. However, the Sioux victory was short-lived and bittersweet. Within half a dozen years, the U.S. military had taken control of the Black Hills and inflicted a series of other defeats on Indian tribes. The 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn occurred because Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Indians resisted being moved onto the Pine Ridge Reservation. Gold had been discovered in the Black Hills, which were sacred to the tribes. They refused to leave or sell the land and move onto the reservation. Ghost dancing, a ritual that spread like wildfire among tribes in the West, instilled fear of an uprising among whites in the area. This eventually led to the tragic Wounded Knee massacre in December, 1890. The government's policy of "assimilation" sought not only to turn Indians into family farmers, but also to convert them to Christianity. The goal of white-run Indian schools was to acculturate Indian youth to white values and help them assimilate into the larger Anglo society.

The 1887 Dawes Allotment Act sought to abolish reservations and allot land to individual Indians as their own private property. This new policy, while well-meaning in intention, effectively shrank Indian holdings from 138 million acres to 48 million. In fact, the farms were too small to compete economically. In this respect, Indian small farmers were suffering the same fate as other small farmers. Mexican Americans in the West in the late nineteenth century lost title to vast amounts of land. Many Mexican Americans were unable to document land grants that had been given them generations before by the Spanish. In 1850, the rural Mexican population in Texas was about equally divided among ranchers, skilled laborers, and manual laborers. By 1900, manual laborers were over two-thirds of the Mexican population. Hispanic mine workers, farm workers, and construction workers repeatedly resorted to strikes in an attempt to improve their wages and working conditions. Benevolent societies serving community needs also arose, helping to create a distinct Mexican American identity.

### **The Measuring Woman**

Alice Fletcher, a pioneer anthropologist, land surveyor, and advocate of Indian rights, dedicated much of her life to assimilating Native Americans. Like other well-intentioned reformers, Fletcher's actions had both positive and negative results. "The Measuring Woman," as Fletcher came to be known, helped implement the Dawes Act, which attempted to move Native Americans into the mainstream of American life by ending tribal ownership of reservation lands. Unfortunately, many Indians eventually sold their individual allotments and "surplus" lands fell into the hands of white settlers and speculators. Consequently, the program left about two-thirds of the Indian population landless or not owning enough land to earn a subsistence living.

Consider how decisions made and actions taken in the American West during the late 1800s often led to unintended consequences. Can you think of similar situations in contemporary society?

### **Unintended Consequences**

Legislative acts designed to benefit people sometimes become an instrument of unintended destruction. This activity looks at both positive and negative effects of legislation related to white encroachment in the American West during the late 1800s.

## **Interactive Activity: Unintended Consequences**

This activity looks at both positive and negative effects of legislation related to white encroachment in the American West during the late 1800s. The Homestead Act of 1862 gave 160 acres to any citizen or prospective citizen who settled on the land for 5 years, but it lured some settlers to the West who did not have sufficient resources to be successful in harsh environments. The distribution of public lands also greatly increased the pressure on Native Americans to assimilate. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned Chinese from entering the U.S. for decades. The law grew from resentment in the American labor force against Chinese immigrants who often worked for low wages, especially in the mining, prospecting, and railroad industries. As a result, job opportunities in California farm labor were opened to Mexicans, Filipinos, and Japanese. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 granted American citizenship to Mexican Americans, but the act of becoming U.S. citizens reduced Mexican Americans to a minority class. Eventually, many were dispossessed of their land when they could not substantiate their claims in court. This altered the class structure of the Hispanic population and forced many to become part of a migrant labor force. The Dawes Act of 1887 granted each Indian household 160 acres of land from reservation property and granted full American citizenship to Indians who took land allotments. However, implementation of the Dawes Act actually deprived Native Americans of millions of acres of land and struck a damaging blow to tribal culture when “surplus lands” were opened to white settlement. The Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868 designated the Black Hills of South Dakota as part of the Great Sioux Reservation and guaranteed Indians control of the sacred lands in the Black Hills. Sadly, it also continued the unfortunate tradition of broken treaties between the U.S. government and Indians. The discovery of gold during the illegal Custer Expedition of 1874 set off a gold rush in the Black Hills. The government’s failure to abide by the terms of the treaty led to armed conflicts between whites and Indians, including the Battle of Little Big Horn.

## **Additional Resources**

### **Websites**

#### **[Assimilation through Education](#)**

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/assimilation/>

Photos, early film footage, federal government reports, cartoons, and maps tell the complex tale

of efforts to assimilate Native Americans through education.

**[Alice Fletcher Diary](#)**

[http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/fletcher/acf\\_sept\\_16.htm](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/fletcher/acf_sept_16.htm)

The online edition of *Camping With the Sioux: Fieldwork Diary of Alice Cunningham Fletcher* is based on two journals kept by Fletcher during a six-week venture into Plains Indian territory in 1881.