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## RECONSTRUCTION: AN UNFINISHED REVOLUTION 1865–1877

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Wartime Reconstruction
- The Meanings of Freedom
- Johnson's Reconstruction Plan
- The Congressional Reconstruction Plan
- Politics and Reconstruction in the South
- Retreat from Reconstruction
- *LINKS TO THE WORLD* The "Back to Africa" Movement
- Summary

### WARTIME RECONSTRUCTION

Civil wars leave immense challenges of healing, justice, and physical rebuilding. Anticipating that process, reconstruction of the Union was an issue as early as 1863, well before the war ended. Many key questions loomed on the horizon when and if the North succeeded on the battlefield: How would the nation be restored? How would southern states and leaders be treated—as errant brothers or as traitors? What was the constitutional basis for readmission of states to the Union, and where, if anywhere, could American statesmen look for precedence or guidance? More specifically, four vexing problems compelled early thinking and would haunt the Reconstruction era throughout. One, who would rule in the South once it was defeated? Two, who would rule in the federal government—Congress or the president? Three, what were the dimensions of black freedom, and what rights under law would the freedmen enjoy? And four, would Reconstruction be a preservation of the old republic or a second Revolution, a reinvention of a new republic?

#### **Lincoln's 10 Percent Plan**

Abraham Lincoln had never been antisouthern, though he had become the leader of an antislavery war. He lost three brothers-in-law, killed in the war on the Confederate side. His worst fear was that the war would collapse at the end into guerrilla warfare across the South, with surviving bands of Confederates carrying on resistance. Lincoln insisted that his generals give lenient terms to southern soldiers once they

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1865** Johnson begins rapid and lenient Reconstruction  
White southern governments pass restrictive black codes  
Congress refuses to seat southern representatives  
Thirteenth Amendment ratified, abolishing slavery
- 1866** Congress passes Civil Rights Act and renewal of Freedmen’s Bureau over Johnson’s veto  
Congress approves Fourteenth Amendment  
In *Ex parte Milligan*, the Supreme Court reasserts its influence
- 1867** Congress passes First Reconstruction Act and Tenure of Office Act  
Constitutional conventions called in southern states
- 1868** House impeaches and Senate acquits Johnson  
Most southern states readmitted to Union under Radical plan  
Fourteenth Amendment ratified  
Grant elected president
- 1869** Congress approves Fifteenth Amendment (ratified in 1870)
- 1871** Congress passes second Enforcement Act and Ku Klux Klan Act  
Treaty with England settles Alabama claims
- 1872** Amnesty Act frees almost all remaining Confederates from restrictions on holding office  
Grant reelected
- 1873** *Slaughter-House* cases limit power of Fourteenth Amendment  
Panic of 1873 leads to widespread unemployment and labor strife
- 1874** Democrats win majority in House of Representatives
- 1875** Several Grant appointees indicted for corruption  
Congress passes weak Civil Rights Act  
Democratic Party increases control of southern states with white supremacy campaigns
- 1876** *U.S. v. Cruikshank* further weakens Fourteenth Amendment  
Presidential election disputed
- 1877** Congress elects Hayes president

surrendered. In his Second Inaugural Address, delivered only a month before his assassination, Lincoln promised “malice toward none; with charity for all,” as Americans strove to “bind up the nation’s wounds.”

Lincoln planned early for a swift and moderate Reconstruction process. In his “Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction,” issued in December 1863, he proposed to replace majority rule with “loyal rule” as a means of reconstructing southern state governments. He proposed pardons to all ex-Confederates except the highest-ranking military and civilian officers. Then, as soon as 10 percent of the voting population in the 1860 general election in a given state had taken an oath

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to the United States and established a government, the new state would be recognized. Lincoln did not consult Congress in these plans, and “loyal” assemblies (known as “Lincoln governments”) were created in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Arkansas in 1864, states largely occupied by Union troops. These governments were weak and dependent on northern armies for survival.

### **Congress and the Wade-Davis Bill**

Congress responded with great hostility to Lincoln’s moves to readmit southern states in what seemed such a premature manner. Many Radical Republicans, strong proponents of emancipation and of aggressive prosecution of the war against the South, considered the 10 percent plan a “mere mockery” of democracy. Led by Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania in the House and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in the Senate, congressional Republicans locked horns with Lincoln and proposed a longer and harsher approach to Reconstruction. Stevens advocated a “conquered provinces” theory, arguing that southerners had organized as a foreign nation to make war on the United States and, by secession, had destroyed their status as states. They therefore must be treated as “conquered foreign lands” and returned to the status of “unorganized territories” before any process of readmission could be entertained by Congress.

In July 1864, the Wade-Davis bill, named for its sponsors, Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio and Congressman Henry W. Davis of Maryland, emerged from Congress with three specific conditions for southern readmission.

1. It demanded a “majority” of white male citizens participating in the creation of a new government.
2. To vote or be a delegate to constitutional conventions, men had to take an “iron-clad” oath (declaring that they had never aided the Confederate war effort).
3. All officers above the rank of lieutenant and all civil officials in the Confederacy would be disfranchised and deemed “not a citizen of the United States.”

The Confederate states were to be defined as “conquered enemies,” said Davis, and the process of readmission was to be harsh and slow. Lincoln, ever the adroit politician, pocket-vetoed the bill and issued a conciliatory proclamation of his own, announcing that he would not be inflexibly committed to any “one plan” of Reconstruction.

This exchange came during Grant’s bloody campaign against Lee in Virginia, when the outcome of the war and Lincoln’s reelection were still in doubt. On August 5, Radical Republicans issued the “Wade-Davis Manifesto” to newspapers. An unprecedented attack on a sitting president by members of his own party, it accused Lincoln of usurpation of presidential powers and disgraceful leniency toward an eventually conquered South. What emerged in 1864–1865 was a clear debate and a potential constitutional crisis. Lincoln saw Reconstruction as a means of weakening the Confederacy and winning the war; the Radicals saw it as a longer-term transformation of the political and racial order of the country.

### **Thirteenth Amendment**

In early 1865, Congress and Lincoln joined in two important measures that recognized slavery’s centrality to the war. On January 31, with strong administration backing, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment, which had two provisions: first, it abolished involuntary servitude everywhere in the United States; second, it declared that

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Congress shall have the power to enforce this outcome by “appropriate legislation.” When the measure passed by 119 to 56, a mere 2 votes more than the necessary two-thirds, rejoicing broke out in Congress. A Republican recorded in his diary, “Members joined in the shouting and kept it up for some minutes. Some embraced one another, others wept like children. I have felt ever since the vote, as if I were in a new country.”

But the Thirteenth Amendment had emerged from a long congressional debate and considerable petitioning and public advocacy. One of the first and most remarkable petitions for a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery was submitted early in 1864 by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and the Women’s Loyal National League. Women throughout the Union accumulated thousands of signatures, even venturing into staunchly pro-Confederate regions of Kentucky and Missouri to secure supporters. It was a long road from the Emancipation Proclamation to the Thirteenth Amendment—through treacherous constitutional theory about individual “property rights,” a bedrock of belief that the sacred document ought never to be altered, and partisan politics. But the logic of winning the war by crushing slavery, and of securing a new beginning under law for the nation that so many had died to save, won the day.

### **Freedmen’s Bureau**

Potentially as significant, on March 3, 1865, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands—the Freedmen’s Bureau, an unprecedented agency of social uplift necessitated by the ravages of the war. Americans had never engaged in federal aid to citizens on such a scale. With thousands of refugees, white and black, displaced in the South, the government continued what private freedmen’s aid societies had started as early as 1862. In the mere four years of its existence, the Freedmen’s Bureau supplied food and medical services, built several thousand schools and some colleges, negotiated several hundred thousand employment contracts between freedmen and their former masters, and tried to manage confiscated land.

The Bureau would be a controversial aspect of Reconstruction—within the South, where whites generally hated it, and within the federal government, where politicians divided over its constitutionality. Some bureau agents were devoted to freedmen’s rights, whereas others were opportunists who exploited the chaos of the postwar South. The war had forced into the open an eternal question of republics: what are the social welfare obligations of the state toward its people, and what do people owe their governments in return? Apart from their conquest and displacement of the eastern Indians, Americans were relatively inexperienced at the Freedmen’s Bureau’s task—social reform through military occupation.

### **Ruins and Enmity**

In 1865, due to the devastation of the war, America was now a land with ruins. Like the countries of Europe, it now seemed an older, more historic landscape. It had torn itself asunder—physically, politically, spiritually. Some of its cities lay in rubble, large stretches of the southern countryside were depopulated and defoliated, and thousands of people, white and black, were refugees. Some of this would in time seem romantic to northern travelers in the postwar South.

Thousands of yeoman farmer-soldiers, some paroled by surrenders and others who had abandoned Confederate ranks earlier, walked home too late in the season to plant a crop in a collapsed economy. Many white refugees faced genuine starvation. Of the approximately 18,300,000 rations distributed across the South

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in the first three years of the Freedmen's Bureau, 5,230,000 went to whites. In early 1866, in a proud agricultural society, the legislature of South Carolina issued \$300,000 in state bonds to purchase corn for the destitute.

In October 1865, just after a five-month imprisonment in Boston, former Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens rode a slow train southward. In Virginia he found "the desolation of the country ... was horrible to behold." When Stephens reached northern Georgia, his native state, his shock ran over: "War has left a terrible impression.... Fences gone, fields all a-waste, houses burnt." A northern journalist visiting Richmond that same fall observed a city "mourning for her sins ... in dust and ashes." The "burnt district" was a "bed of cinders ... broken and blackened walls, impassable streets deluged with debris." Above all, every northern traveler encountered a wall of hatred among white southerners for their conquerors. An innkeeper in North Carolina told a journalist that Yankees had killed his sons in the war, burned his house, and stolen his slaves. "They left me one inestimable privilege," he said, "to hate 'em. I git up at half-past four in the morning, and sit up 'til twelve at night, to hate 'em."

## THE MEANINGS OF FREEDOM

Black southerners entered into life after slavery with hope and circumspection. A Texas man recalled his father's telling him, even before the war was over, "Our forever was going to be spent living among the Southerners, after they got licked." Freed men and women tried to gain as much as they could from their new circumstances. Often the changes they valued the most were personal—alterations in location, employer, or living arrangements.

### The Feel of Freedom

For America's former slaves, Reconstruction had one paramount meaning: a chance to explore freedom. A southern white woman admitted in her diary that the black people "showed a natural and exultant joy at being free." Former slaves remembered singing far into the night after federal troops, who confirmed rumors of their emancipation, reached their plantations. The slaves on a Texas plantation shouted for joy, their leader proclaiming, "We is free—no more whippings and beatings." A few people gave in to the natural desire to do what had been impossible before. One angry grandmother dropped her hoe and ran to confront her mistress. "I'm free!" she yelled. "Yes, I'm free! Ain't got to work for you no more! You can't put me in your pocket now!" Another man recalled that he and others "started on the move," either to search for family members or just to exercise the human right of mobility.

Many freed men and women reacted more cautiously and shrewdly, taking care to test the boundaries of their new condition. "After the war was over," explained one man, "we was afraid to move. Just like terrapins or turtles after emancipation. Just stick our heads out to see how the land lay." As slaves, they had learned to expect hostility from white people, and they did not presume it would instantly disappear. Life in freedom might still be a matter of what was possible, not what was right. Many freedpeople evaluated potential employers with shrewd caution. "Most all the Negroes that had good owners stayed with 'em, but the others left. Some of 'em come back and some didn't," explained one man. After considerable wandering in search of better circumstances, a majority

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of blacks eventually settled as agricultural workers back on their former farms or plantations. But they relocated their houses and did their utmost to control the conditions of their labor.

### Reunion of African American Families

Throughout the South, former slaves devoted themselves to reuniting their families, separated during slavery by sale or hardship, and during the war by dislocation and the emancipation process. With only shreds of information to guide them, thousands of freedpeople embarked on odysseys in search of a husband, wife, child, or parent. By relying on the black community for help and information, and by placing ads that continued to appear in black newspapers well into the 1880s, some succeeded in their quest, while others searched in vain.

Husbands and wives who had belonged to different masters established homes together for the first time, and, as they had tried under slavery, parents asserted the right to raise their own children. A mother bristled when her old master claimed a right to whip her children. She informed him that “he warn’t goin’ to brush none of her chilluns no more.” The freed men and women were too much at risk to act recklessly, but, as one man put it, they were tired of punishment and “sure didn’t take no more foolishment off of white folks.”

### Blacks’ Search for Independence

Many black people wanted to minimize contact with whites because, as Reverend Garrison Frazier told General Sherman in January 1865, “There is a prejudice against us ... that will take years to get over.” To avoid contact with overbearing whites who were used to supervising them, blacks abandoned the slave quarters and fanned out to distant corners of the land they worked. “After the war my stepfather come,” recalled Annie Young, “and got my mother and we moved out in the piney woods.” Others described moving “across the creek” or building a “saplin house ... back in the woods.” Some rural dwellers established small, all-black settlements that still exist along the back roads of the South.

Even once-privileged slaves desired such independence and social separation. One man turned down his master’s offer of the overseer’s house and moved instead to a shack in “Freetown.” He also declined to let the former owner grind his grain for free because it “make him feel like a free man to pay for things just like anyone else.”

### Freedpeople’s Desire for Land

In addition to a fair employer, what freed men and women most wanted was the ownership of land. Land represented self-sufficiency and a chance to gain compensation for generations of bondage. General Sherman’s special Field Order Number 15, issued in February 1865, set aside 400,000 acres of land in the Sea Islands region for the exclusive settlement of freedpeople. Hope swelled among ex-slaves as forty-acre plots, mules, and “possessary titles” were promised to them. But President Johnson ordered them removed in October and the land returned to its original owners under army enforcement. A northern observer noted that slaves freed in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia made “plain, straight-forward” inquiries as they settled on new land. They wanted to be sure the land “would be theirs after they had improved it.” Everywhere, blacks young and old thirsted for homes of their own.

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But most members of both political parties opposed genuine land redistribution to the freedmen. Even northern reformers who had administered the Sea Islands during the war showed little sympathy for black aspirations. The former Sea Island slaves wanted to establish small, self-sufficient farms. Northern soldiers, officials, and missionaries of both races brought education and aid to the freedmen but also insisted that they grow cotton for competitive market.

“The Yankees preach nothing but cotton, cotton!” complained one Sea Island black. “We wants land,” wrote another, but tax officials “make the lots too big, and cut we out.” Indeed, the U.S. government eventually sold thousands of acres in the Sea Islands, 90 percent of which went to wealthy investors from the North. At a protest against evictions from a contraband camp in Virginia in 1866, freedman Bayley Wyatt made black desires and claims clear: “We has a right to the land where we are located. For why? I tell you. Our wives, our children, our husbands, has been sold over and over again to purchase the lands we now locates upon; for that reason we have a divine right to the land.”

### **Black Embrace of Education**

Ex-slaves everywhere reached out for education. Blacks of all ages hungered for the knowledge in books that had been permitted only to whites. With freedom, they started schools and filled classrooms both day and night. On log seats and dirt floors, freed men and women studied their letters in old almanacs and in discarded dictionaries. Young children brought infants to school with them, and adults attended at night or after “the crops were laid by.” Many a teacher had “to make herself heard over three other classes reciting in concert” in a small room. The desire to escape slavery’s ignorance was so great that, despite their poverty, many blacks paid tuition, typically \$1 or \$1.50 a month. These small amounts constituted major portions of a person’s agricultural wages and added up to more than \$1 million by 1870.

The federal government and northern reformers of both races assisted this pursuit of education. In its brief life, the Freedmen’s Bureau founded over four thousand schools, and idealistic men and women from the North established others funded by private philanthropy. The Yankee schoolmarm—dedicated, selfless, and religious—became an agent of progress in many southern communities. Thus did African Americans seek a break from their past through learning. More than 600,000 were enrolled in elementary school by 1877.

Blacks and their white allies also saw the need for colleges and universities. The American Missionary Association founded seven colleges, including Fisk and Atlanta Universities, between 1866 and 1869. The Freedmen’s Bureau helped to establish Howard University in Washington, D.C., and northern religious groups, such as the Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists, supported dozens of seminaries and teachers’ colleges.

During Reconstruction, African American leaders often were highly educated individuals; many were from the prewar elite of free people of color. Francis Cardozo, who held various offices in South Carolina, had attended universities in Scotland and England. P. B. S. Pinchback, who became lieutenant governor of Louisiana, was the son of a planter who had sent him to school in Cincinnati. Both of the two black senators from Mississippi, Blanche K. Bruce and Hiram Revels, possessed privileged educations. Bruce was the son of a planter who had

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*African Americans of all ages eagerly pursued the opportunity to gain an education in freedom. This young woman in Mt. Meigs, Alabama, is helping her mother learn to read.*



Smithsonian Institution, photo by Rudolf Eickemeyer

provided tutoring at home; Revels was the son of free North Carolina blacks who had sent him to Knox College in Illinois. These men and many self-educated former slaves brought to political office not only fervor but education.

### **Growth of Black Churches**

Freed from the restrictions and regulations of slavery, blacks could build their own institutions as they saw fit. The secret churches of slavery came into the open; in countless communities throughout the South, ex-slaves “started a brush arbor.” A brush arbor was merely “a sort of ... shelter with leaves for a roof,” but the freed men and women worshiped in it enthusiastically. “Preachin’ and shouting sometimes lasted all day,” they recalled, for the opportunity to worship together freely meant “glorious times.”

Within a few years, independent branches of the Methodist and Baptist denominations had attracted the great majority of black Christians in the South. By 1877, in South Carolina alone, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church had a thousand ministers, forty-four thousand members, and its own school of theology, while the A.M.E. Zion Church had forty-five thousand members. In the rapid growth of churches, some of which became the wealthiest and most autonomous institutions in black life, the freedpeople demonstrated their most secure claim on freedom and created enduring communities.

### **Rise of the Sharecropping System**

The desire to gain as much independence as possible also shaped the former slaves’ economic arrangements. Since most of them lacked money to buy land, they preferred the next best thing: renting the land they worked. But the South had a cash-poor economy with few sources of credit, and few whites would

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consider renting land to blacks. Most blacks had no means to get cash before the harvest, so other alternatives had to be tried.

Black farmers and white landowners therefore turned to sharecropping, a system in which farmers kept part of their crop and gave the rest to the landowner while living on his property. The landlord or a merchant “furnished” food and supplies, such as draft animals and seed, needed before the harvest, and he received payment from the crop. White landowners and black farmers bargained with one another; sharecroppers would hold out, or move and try to switch employers from one year to another. As the system matured during the 1870s and 1880s, most sharecroppers worked “on halves”—half for the owner and half for themselves.

The sharecropping system, which materialized as early as 1868 in parts of the South, originated as a desirable compromise between former slaves and landowners. It eased landowners' problems with cash and credit, and provided them a permanent, dependent labor force; blacks accepted it because it gave them freedom from daily supervision. Instead of working in the hated gangs under a white overseer, as in slavery, they farmed their own plots of land in family groups. But sharecropping later proved to be a disaster. Owners and merchants developed a monopoly of control over the agricultural economy, as sharecroppers found themselves riveted in ever-increasing debt.

The fundamental problem, however, was that southern farmers as a whole still concentrated on cotton. In freedom, black women often chose to stay away from the fields and cotton picking, to concentrate on domestic chores. Given the diminishing incentives of the system, they placed greater value on independent choices about gender roles and family organization than on reaching higher levels of production. The South did recover its prewar share of British cotton purchases, but the rewards diminished. Cotton prices began a long decline, as world demand fell off.

Thus, southern agriculture slipped deeper and deeper into depression. Black sharecroppers struggled under a growing burden of debt which reduced their independence and bound them to landowners and to furnishing merchants almost as oppressively as slavery had bound them to their masters. Many white farmers became debtors, too, gradually lost their land, and joined the ranks of sharecroppers. By the end of Reconstruction, over one-third of all southern farms were worked by sharecropping tenants, white and black. This economic transformation took place as the nation struggled to put its political house back in order.

## JOHNSON'S RECONSTRUCTION PLAN

When Reconstruction began under President Andrew Johnson, many expected his policies to be harsh. Throughout his career in Tennessee, he had criticized the wealthy planters and championed the small farmers. When an assassin's bullet thrust Johnson into the presidency, many former slaveowners shared the dismay of a North Carolina woman who wrote, “Think of Andy Johnson [as] the president! What will become of us—‘the aristocrats of the South’ as we are termed?” Northern Radicals also had reason to believe that Johnson would deal sternly with the South. When one of them suggested the exile or execution of ten or twelve leading rebels to set an example, Johnson replied, “How are you going to pick out so small a number? ... Treason is a crime; and crime must be punished.”

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**Andrew Johnson of Tennessee** Like his martyred predecessor, Johnson followed a path in antebellum politics from obscurity to power. With no formal education, he became a tailor's apprentice. But from 1829, while in his early twenties, he held nearly every office in Tennessee politics: alderman, state representative, congressman, two terms as governor, and U.S. senator by 1857. Although elected as a southern Democrat, Johnson was the only senator from a seceded state who refused to follow his state out of the Union. Lincoln appointed him war governor of Tennessee in 1862; hence his symbolic place on the ticket in the president's bid for reelection in 1864.

Although a Unionist, Johnson's political beliefs made him an old Jacksonian Democrat. And as they said in the mountainous region of east Tennessee, where Johnson established a reputation as a stump speaker, "Old Andy never went back on his raisin." Johnson was also an ardent states' rightist. Before the war, he had supported tax-funded public schools and homestead legislation, fashioning himself as a champion of the common man. Although he vehemently opposed secession, Johnson advocated limited government. He shared none of the Radicals' expansive conception of federal power. His philosophy toward Reconstruction may be summed up in the slogan he adopted: "The Constitution as it is, and the Union as it was."

Through 1865, Johnson alone controlled Reconstruction policy, for Congress recessed shortly before he became president and did not reconvene until December. In the following eight months, Johnson formed new state governments in the South by using his power to grant pardons. He advanced Lincoln's leniency by extending even easier terms to former Confederates.

### **Johnson's Racial Views**

Johnson had owned house slaves, although he had never been a planter. He accepted emancipation as a result of the war, but he did not favor black civil and political rights. Johnson believed that black suffrage could never be imposed on a southern state by the federal government, and that set him on a collision course with the Radicals. When it came to race, Johnson was a thoroughgoing white supremacist. He held what one politician called "unconquerable prejudices against the African race." In perhaps the most blatantly racist official statement ever delivered by an American president, Johnson declared in his annual message of 1867 that blacks possessed less "capacity for government than any other race of people. No independent government of any form has ever been successful in their hands; ... wherever they have been left to their own devices they have shown a constant tendency to relapse into barbarism."

Such racial views had an enduring effect on Johnson's policies. Where whites were concerned, however, Johnson seemed to be pursuing changes in class relations. He proposed rules that would keep the wealthy planter class at least temporarily out of power.

### **Johnson's Pardon Policy**

White southerners were required to swear an oath of loyalty as a condition of gaining amnesty or pardon, but Johnson barred several categories of people from taking the oath: former federal officials, high-ranking Confederate officers, and political leaders or graduates of West Point or Annapolis who joined the Confederacy. To this list, Johnson added another important group: all ex-Confederates whose taxable property was worth more than \$20,000. These individuals had to apply personally to the president for pardon and

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*Combative and inflexible, President Andrew Johnson contributed greatly to the failure of his own Reconstruction program.*



Library of Congress

restoration of their political rights. The president, it seemed, meant to take revenge on the old planter elite and thereby promote a new leadership of deserving yeomen.

Johnson appointed provisional governors, who began the Reconstruction process by calling state constitutional conventions. The delegates chosen for these conventions had to draft new constitutions that eliminated slavery and invalidated secession. After ratification of these constitutions, new governments could be elected, and the states would be restored to the Union with full congressional representation. But only those southerners who had taken the oath of amnesty and had been eligible to vote on the day the state seceded could participate in this process. Thus unpardoned whites and former slaves were not eligible.

### **Presidential Reconstruction**

If Johnson intended to strip former aristocrats of their power, he did not hold to his plan. The old white leadership proved resilient and influential; prominent Confederates won elections and turned up in various appointive offices. Then Johnson started pardoning planters and leading rebels. He hired additional clerks to prepare the necessary documents and then began to issue pardons to large categories of people. By September 1865, hundreds were issued in a single day. These pardons, plus the rapid return of planters' abandoned lands, restored the old elite to power and quickly gave Johnson an image as the South's champion.

Why did Johnson allow the planters to regain power? Personal vanity may have played a role, as he turned proud planters into pardon seekers. He was also determined to achieve a rapid Reconstruction in order to deny the Radicals any opportunity for the more thorough racial and political changes they desired in the South. And Johnson needed southern support in the 1866 elections; hence, he declared Reconstruction complete only eight months after Appomattox. Thus, in

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December 1865, many Confederate congressmen traveled to Washington to claim seats in the U.S. Congress. Even Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy, returned to Capitol Hill as a senator-elect from Georgia.

The election of such prominent rebels troubled many northerners. Some of the state conventions were slow to repudiate secession; others admitted only grudgingly that slavery was dead and wrote new laws to show it.

**Black Codes** Furthermore, to define the status of freed men and women and control their labor, some legislatures merely revised large sections of the slave codes by substituting the word *freedmen* for *slaves*. The new black codes compelled former slaves to carry passes, observe a curfew, live in housing provided by a landowner, and give up hope of entering many desirable occupations. Stiff vagrancy laws and restrictive labor contracts bound freedpeople to plantations, and “anti-enticement” laws punished anyone who tried to lure these workers to other employment. State-supported schools and orphanages excluded blacks entirely.

It seemed to northerners that the South was intent on returning African Americans to servility and that Johnson’s Reconstruction policy held no one responsible for the terrible war. But memories of the war—not yet even a year over—were still raw and would dominate political behavior for several elections to come. Thus, the Republican majority in Congress decided to call a halt to the results of Johnson’s plan. On reconvening, the House and Senate considered the credentials of the newly elected southern representatives and decided not to admit them. Instead, they bluntly challenged the president’s authority and established a joint committee to study and investigate a new direction for Reconstruction.

## THE CONGRESSIONAL RECONSTRUCTION PLAN

Northern congressmen were hardly unified, but they did not doubt their right to shape Reconstruction policy. The Constitution mentioned neither secession nor reunion, but it gave Congress the primary role in the admission of states. Moreover, the Constitution declared that the United States shall guarantee to each state a “republican form of government.” This provision, legislators believed, gave them the authority to devise policies for Reconstruction.

They soon found that other constitutional questions affected their policies. What, for example, had rebellion done to the relationship between southern states and the Union? Lincoln had always believed secession impossible—the Confederate states had engaged in an “insurrection” within the Union in his view. Congressmen who favored vigorous Reconstruction measures argued that the war had broken the Union and that the South was subject to the victor’s will. Moderate congressmen held that the states had forfeited their rights through rebellion and thus had come under congressional supervision.

**The Radicals** These theories mirrored the diversity of Congress itself. Northern Democrats, weakened by their opposition to the war in its final year, denounced any idea of racial equality and supported Johnson’s policies. Conservative Republicans, despite their party loyalty, favored a limited federal role in Reconstruction. The Radical Republicans, led by Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and George Julian, wanted to transform the South. Although a minority in their party, they had the advantage of clearly defined goals. They

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believed it was essential to democratize the South, establish public education, and ensure the rights of the freedpeople. They favored black suffrage, supported some land confiscation and redistribution, and were willing to exclude the South from the Union for several years if necessary to achieve their goals.

Born of the war and its outcome, the Radicals brought a new civic vision to American life; they wanted to create an activist federal government and the beginnings of racial equality. A large group of moderate Republicans, led by Lyman Trumbull, opposed Johnson's leniency but wanted to restrain the Radicals. Trumbull and the moderates were, however, committed to federalizing the enforcement of civil, if not political, rights for the freedmen.

One overwhelming political reality faced all four groups: the 1866 elections. Ironically, Johnson and the Democrats sabotaged the possibility of a conservative coalition. They refused to cooperate with conservative or moderate Republicans and insisted that Reconstruction was over, that the new state governments were legitimate, and that southern representatives should be admitted to Congress. Among the Republicans, the Radicals' influence grew in proportion to Johnson's intransigence and outright provocation.

### **Congress Versus Johnson**

Trying to work with Johnson, Republicans believed a compromise had been reached in the spring of 1866. Under its terms, Johnson would agree to two modifications of his program: extension of the Freedmen's Bureau for another year and passage of a civil rights bill to counteract the black codes. This bill would force southern courts to practice equality under the ultimate scrutiny of the federal judiciary. Its provisions applied to public, not private, acts of discrimination. The Civil Rights Bill of 1866 was the first statutory definition of the rights of American citizens and is still on the books today.

Johnson destroyed the compromise, however, by vetoing both bills (they later became law when Congress overrode the president's veto). Denouncing any change in his program, the president condemned Congress's action and revealed his own racism. Because the civil rights bill defined U.S. citizens as native-born persons who were taxed, Johnson claimed it discriminated against "large numbers of intelligent, worthy, and patriotic foreigners ... in favor of the negro." The bill, he said, operated "in favor of the colored and against the white race."

All hope of presidential-congressional cooperation was now dead. In 1866, newspapers reported daily violations of blacks' rights in the South and carried alarming accounts of antiblack violence—notably in Memphis and New Orleans, where police aided brutal mobs in their attacks. In Memphis, forty blacks were killed and twelve schools burned by white mobs, and in New Orleans, the toll was thirty-four African Americans dead and two hundred wounded. Such violence convinced Republicans, and the northern public, that more needed to be done. A new Republican plan took the form of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

### **Fourteenth Amendment**

Of the five sections of the Fourteenth Amendment, the first would have the greatest legal significance in later years. It conferred citizenship on "all persons born or naturalized in the United States" and prohibited states from abridging their constitutional "privileges and immunities" (see the Appendix for the Constitution and all amendments). It also barred

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any state from taking a person's life, liberty, or property "without due process of law" and from denying "equal protection of the laws." These resounding phrases have become powerful guarantees of African Americans' civil rights—indeed, of the rights of all citizens, except for Indians, who were not granted citizenship rights until 1924.

Nearly universal agreement emerged among Republicans on the amendment's second and third sections. The fourth declared the Confederate debt null and void, and guaranteed the war debt of the United States. Northerners rejected the notion of paying taxes to reimburse those who had financed a rebellion, and business groups agreed on the necessity of upholding the credit of the U.S. government. The second and third sections barred Confederate leaders from holding state and federal office. Only Congress, by a two-thirds vote of each house, could remove the penalty. The amendment thus guaranteed a degree of punishment for the leaders of the Confederacy.

The second section of the amendment also dealt with representation and embodied the compromises that produced the document. Northerners disagreed about whether blacks should have the right to vote. As a citizen of Indiana wrote to a southern relative, "[a]lthough there is a great deal [of] profession among us for the relief of the darkey yet I think much of it is far from being sincere. I guess we want to compell you to do right by them while we are not willing ourselves to do so." Those arched words are indicative not only of how revolutionary Reconstruction had become, but also of how far the public will, North and South, lagged behind the enactments that became new constitutional cornerstones. Many northern states still maintained black disfranchisement laws during Reconstruction.

Emancipation finally ended the three-fifths clause for the purpose of counting blacks, which would increase southern representation. Thus, the postwar South stood to gain power in Congress, and if white southerners did not allow blacks to vote, former secessionists would derive the political benefit from emancipation. That was more irony than most northerners could bear. So Republicans determined that, if a southern state did not grant black men the vote, their representation would be reduced proportionally. If they did enfranchise black men, their representation would be increased proportionally. This compromise avoided a direct enactment of black suffrage but would deliver future black southern voters to the Republican Party.

The Fourteenth Amendment specified for the first time that voters were "male" and ignored female citizens, black and white. For this reason, it provoked a strong reaction from the women's rights movement. Advocates of women's equality had worked with abolitionists for decades, often subordinating their cause to that of the slaves. During the drafting of the Fourteenth Amendment, however, female activists demanded to be heard. Prominent leaders, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, ended their alliance with abolitionists and fought for women, while others remained committed to the idea that it was "the Negro's hour." Thus, the amendment infused new life into the women's rights movement and caused considerable strife among old allies. Many male former abolitionists, white and black, were willing to delay the day of woman suffrage in favor of securing freedmen the right to vote in the South.

### The South's and Johnson's Defiance

In 1866, however, the major question in Reconstruction politics was how the public would respond to the congressional initiative. Johnson did his best to block the Fourteenth Amendment in both North and South. Condemning Congress for its refusal to seat southern representatives, the president urged state legislatures in the

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South to vote against ratification. Every southern legislature, except Tennessee's, rejected the amendment by a wide margin.

To present his case to northerners, Johnson organized a National Union Convention and took to the stump himself. In an age when active personal campaigning was rare for a president, Johnson boarded a special train for a "swing around the circle" that carried his message into the Northeast, the Midwest, and then back to Washington. In city after city, he criticized the Republicans in a ranting, undignified style. Increasingly, audiences rejected his views, hooting and jeering at him. In this whistle-stop tour, Johnson began to hand out American flags with thirty-six rather than twenty-five stars, declaring the Union already restored. At many towns, he likened himself to a "persecuted" Jesus who might now be martyred "upon the cross" for his magnanimity toward the South. And, repeatedly, he labeled the Radicals "traitors" for their efforts to take over Reconstruction.

The elections of 1866 were a resounding victory for Republicans in Congress. Radicals and moderates whom Johnson had denounced won reelection by large margins, and the Republican majority grew to two-thirds of both houses of Congress. The North had spoken clearly: Johnson's official policies of states' rights and white supremacy were prematurely giving the advantage to rebels and traitors. Although the Radicals may have been out ahead of public opinion, most northerners feared Johnson's approach more. Thus, Republican congressional leaders won a mandate to pursue their Reconstruction plan.

But Johnson and southern intransigence had brought the plan to an impasse. Nothing could be accomplished as long as the "Johnson governments" existed and the southern electorate remained exclusively white. Republicans resolved to form new state governments in the South and enfranchise the freedmen.

### **Reconstruction Acts of 1867–1868**

After some embittered debate in which Republicans and the remaining Democrats in Congress argued over the meaning and memory of the Civil War itself, the First Reconstruction Act passed in March 1867. This plan, under which the southern states were actually readmitted to the Union, incorporated only a part of the Radical program. Union generals, commanding small garrisons of troops and charged with supervising elections, assumed control in five military districts in the South (see Map 16.1). Confederate leaders designated in the Fourteenth Amendment were barred from voting until new state constitutions were ratified. The act guaranteed freedmen the right to vote in elections as well as serve in state constitutional conventions and in subsequent elections. In addition, each southern state was required to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, to ratify its new constitution by majority vote, and to submit it to Congress for approval (see Table 16.1).

Thus, African Americans gained an opportunity to fight for a better life through the political process, and ex-Confederates were given what they interpreted as a bitter pill to swallow in order to return to the Union. The Second, Third, and Fourth Reconstruction Acts, passed between March 1867 and March 1868, provided the details of operation for voter registration boards, the adoption of constitutions, and the administration of "good faith" oaths on the part of white southerners.

### **Failure of Land Redistribution**

In the words of one historian, the Radicals succeeded in "clipping Johnson's wings." But they had hoped Congress

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TABLE 16.1 | PLANS FOR RECONSTRUCTION COMPARED

	Johnson's Plan	Radicals' Plan	Fourteenth Amendment	Reconstruction Act of 1867
Voting	Whites only; high-ranking Confederate leaders must seek pardons	Give vote to black males	Southern whites may decide but can lose representation if they deny black suffrage	Black men gain vote; whites barred from office by Fourteenth Amendment cannot vote while new state governments are being formed
Officeholding	Many prominent Confederates regain power	Only loyal white and black males eligible	Confederate leaders barred until Congress votes amnesty	Fourteenth Amendment in effect
Time out of Union	Brief	Several years; until South is thoroughly democratized	Brief	3–5 years after war
Other change in southern society	Little; gain of power by yeomen not realized; emancipation grudgingly accepted, but no black civil or political rights	Expand public education; confiscate land and provide farms for freedmen; expansion of activist federal government	Probably slight, depending on enforcement	Considerable, depending on action of new state governments

could do much more. Thaddeus Stevens, for example, argued that economic opportunity was essential to the freedmen. “If we do not furnish them with homesteads from forfeited and rebel property,” Stevens declared, “and hedge them around with protective laws ... we had better left them in bondage.” Stevens therefore drew up a plan for extensive confiscation and redistribution of land, but it was never realized.

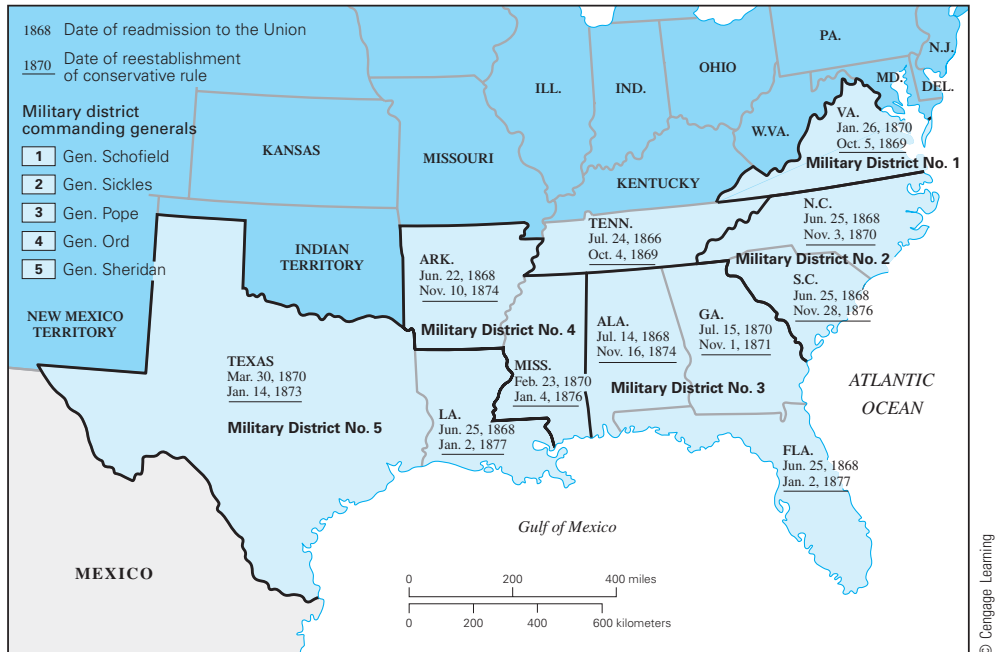
Racial fears among whites and an American obsession with the sanctity of private property made land redistribution unpopular. Northerners were accustomed to a limited role for government, and the business community staunchly opposed any interference with private-property rights, even for former Confederates. Thus, black farmers were forced to seek work in a hostile environment in which landowners opposed their acquisition of land.

### Constitutional Crisis

Congress's quarrels with Andrew Johnson grew still worse. To restrict Johnson's influence and safeguard its plan,

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### MAP 16.1 The Reconstruction

This map shows the five military districts established when Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867. As the dates within each state indicate, conservative Democratic forces quickly regained control of government in four southern states. So-called Radical Reconstruction was curtailed in most of the others as factions within the weakened Republican Party began to cooperate with conservative Democrats.

Congress passed a number of controversial laws. First, it limited Johnson's power over the army by requiring the president to issue military orders through the General of the Army, Ulysses S. Grant, who could not be dismissed without the Senate's consent. Then Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act, which gave the Senate power to approve changes in the president's cabinet. Designed to protect Secretary of War Stanton, who sympathized with the Radicals, this law violated the tradition that a president controlled appointments to his own cabinet.

All of these measures, as well as each of the Reconstruction Acts, were passed by a two-thirds override of presidential vetoes. The situation led some to believe that the federal government had reached a stage of "congressional tyranny" and others to conclude that Johnson had become an obstacle to the legitimate will of the people in reconstructing the nation on a just and permanent basis.

Johnson took several belligerent steps of his own. He issued orders to military commanders in the South, limiting their powers and increasing the powers of the civil governments he had created in 1865. Then he removed military officers who were conscientiously enforcing Congress's new law, preferring commanders who allowed disqualified Confederates to vote. Finally, he tried to remove Secretary of War Stanton. With that attempt, the confrontation reached its climax.

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## Impeachment of President Johnson

Impeachment is a political procedure provided for in the Constitution as a remedy for crimes or serious abuses of power by presidents, federal judges, and other high government officials. Those impeached (judged or politically indicted) in the House are then tried in the Senate. Historically, this power has generally not been used as a means to investigate and judge the private lives of presidents, although in recent times it was used in this manner in the case of President Bill Clinton.

Twice in 1867, the House Judiciary Committee had considered impeachment of Johnson, rejecting the idea once and then recommending it by only a 5-to-4 vote. That recommendation was decisively defeated by the House. After Johnson tried to remove Stanton, however, a third attempt to impeach the president carried easily in early 1868. The indictment concentrated on his violation of the Tenure of Office Act, though many modern scholars regard his efforts to obstruct enforcement of the Reconstruction Act of 1867 as a far more serious offense.

Johnson's trial in the Senate lasted more than three months. The prosecution, led by Radicals, attempted to prove that Johnson was guilty of "high crimes and misdemeanors." But they also argued that the trial was a means to judge Johnson's performance, not a judicial determination of guilt or innocence. The Senate ultimately rejected such reasoning, which could have made removal from office a political weapon against any chief executive who disagreed with Congress. Although a majority of senators voted to convict Johnson, the prosecution fell one vote short of the necessary two-thirds majority. Johnson remained in office, politically weakened and with less than a year left in his term. Some Republicans backed away from impeachment because they had their eyes on the 1868 election and did not want to hurt their prospects of regaining the White House.

**Election of 1868** In the 1868 presidential election, Ulysses S. Grant, running as a Republican, defeated Horatio Seymour, a New York Democrat. Grant was not a Radical, but his platform supported congressional Reconstruction and endorsed black suffrage in the South. (Significantly, Republicans stopped short of endorsing black suffrage in the North.) The Democrats, meanwhile, vigorously denounced Reconstruction and preached white supremacy. Indeed, in the 1868 election, the Democrats conducted the most openly racist campaign to that point in American history. Both sides waved the "bloody shirt," accusing each other as the villains of the war's sacrifices. By associating themselves with rebellion and with Johnson's repudiated program, the Democrats went down to defeat in all but eight states, though the popular vote was fairly close. Participating in their first presidential election ever on a wide scale, blacks decisively voted en masse for General Grant.

In office, Grant acted as an administrator of Reconstruction but not as its enthusiastic advocate. He vacillated in his dealings with the southern states, sometimes defending Republican regimes and sometimes currying favor with Democrats. On occasion, Grant called out federal troops to stop violence or enforce acts of Congress. But he never imposed a true military occupation on the South. Rapid demobilization had reduced a federal army of more than 1 million to 57,000 within a year of the surrender at Appomattox. Thereafter, the number of troops in the South continued to fall, until in 1874 there were only 4,000 in the southern states outside Texas. The later legend of "military rule," so important to southern claims of victimization during Reconstruction, was steeped in myth.

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## Fifteenth Amendment

In 1869, the Radicals pushed through the Fifteenth Amendment, the final major measure in the constitutional revolution of Reconstruction. This measure forbade states to deny the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Such wording did not guarantee the right to vote. It deliberately left states free to restrict suffrage on other grounds so that northern states could continue to deny suffrage to women and certain groups of men—Chinese immigrants, illiterates, and those too poor to pay poll taxes.

Although several states outside the South refused to ratify, three-fourths of the states approved the measure, and the Fifteenth Amendment became law in 1870. It, too, had been a political compromise, and though African Americans rejoiced all across the land at its enactment, it left open the possibility for states to create countless qualification tests to obstruct voting in the future.

With passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, many Americans, especially supportive northerners, considered Reconstruction essentially completed. “Let us have done with Reconstruction,” pleaded the *New York Tribune* in April 1870. “The country is tired and sick of it... Let us have Peace!” But some northerners, like abolitionist Wendell Phillips, worried. “Our day,” he warned, “is fast slipping away. Once let public thought float off from the great issue of the war, and it will take ... more than a generation to bring it back again.”

## POLITICS AND RECONSTRUCTION IN THE SOUTH

From the start, Reconstruction encountered the resistance of white southerners. In the black codes and in private attitudes, many whites stubbornly opposed emancipation, and the former planter class proved especially unbending because of their tremendous financial loss in slaves. In 1866, a Georgia newspaper frankly observed that “most of the white citizens believe that the institution of slavery was right, and ... they will believe that the condition, which comes nearest to slavery, that can now be established will be the best.” And for many poor whites who had never owned slaves and yet had sacrificed enormously in the war, destitution, plummeting agricultural prices, disease, and the uncertainties of a growing urban industrialization drove them off land, toward cities, and into hatred of the very idea of black equality.

## White Resistance

Fearing loss of control over their slaves, some planters attempted to postpone freedom by denying or misrepresenting events. Former slaves reported that their owners “didn’t tell them it was freedom” or “wouldn’t let [them] go.” Agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau reported that “the old system of slavery [is] working with even more rigor than formerly at a few miles distant from any point where U.S. troops are stationed.” To hold onto their workers, some landowners claimed control over black children and used guardianship and apprentice laws to bind black families to the plantation.

Whites also blocked blacks from acquiring land. A few planters divided up plots among their slaves, but most condemned the idea of making blacks landowners. A Georgia woman whose family was known for its support of religious education for slaves was outraged that two property owners planned to “rent their lands to the Negroes!” Such action was, she declared, “injurious to the best interest of the community.”

Adamant resistance by whites soon manifested itself in other ways, including violence. In one North Carolina town, a local magistrate clubbed a black man on

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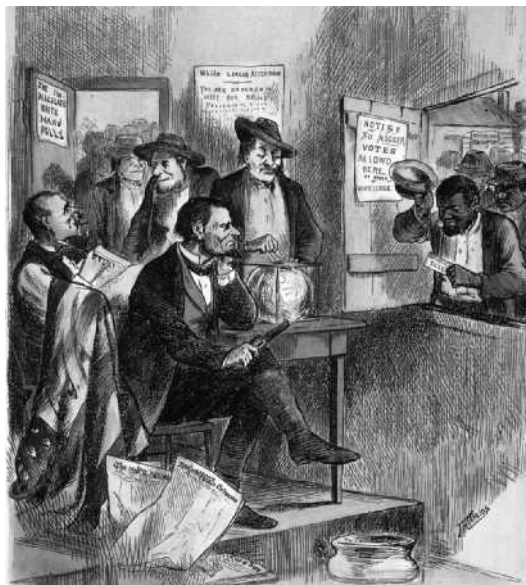
a public street, and in several states bands of “Regulators” terrorized blacks who displayed any independence. Amid their defeat, many planters believed, as a South Carolinian put it, that blacks “can’t be governed except with the whip.” And after President Johnson encouraged the South to resist congressional Reconstruction, many white conservatives worked hard to capture the new state governments while others boycotted the polls in an attempt to defeat Congress’s plans.

### Black Voters and the Southern Republican Party

Very few black men stayed away from the polls. Enthusiastically and hopefully, they voted Republican. Most agreed with one man who felt he should “stick to the end with the party that freed me.” Illiteracy did not prohibit blacks (or uneducated whites) from making intelligent choices. Although Mississippi’s William Henry could read only “a little,” he testified that he and his friends had no difficulty selecting the Republican ballot. “We stood around and watched,” he explained. “We saw D. Sledge vote; he owned half the county. We knowed he voted Democratic so we voted the other ticket so it would be Republican.” Women, who could not vote, encouraged their husbands and sons, and preachers exhorted their congregations to use the franchise. Zeal for voting spread through entire black communities.

Thanks to a large black turnout and the restrictions on prominent Confederates, a new southern Republican Party came to power in the constitutional conventions of 1868–1870. Republican delegates consisted of a sizable contingent of blacks (265 out of the total of just over 1,000 delegates throughout the South), some northerners who had moved to the South, and native southern whites who favored change. The new constitutions drafted by this Republican coalition were more democratic than anything previously adopted in the history of the South. They eliminated property qualifications for voting and holding office, and they turned many appointed offices into elective posts. They provided for public schools and institutions to care for the mentally ill, the blind, the deaf, the destitute, and the orphaned.

*Southern blacks attempting to vote are halted by White Leaguers in this engraving by J. H. Wares. The black man doffing his cap holds a “Republican ticket” but it will not get him to the ballot box, guarded by the election judge with a loaded pistol.*



Granger Collection

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The conventions broadened women's rights in property holding and divorce. Usually, the goal was not to make women equal with men but to provide relief to thousands of suffering debtors. In white families left poverty-stricken by the war and weighed down by debt, it was usually the husband who had contracted the debts. Thus, giving women legal control over their own property provided some protection to their families.

### **Triumph of Republican Governments**

Under these new constitutions, the southern states elected Republican-controlled governments. For the first time, the ranks of state legislators in 1868 included black southerners. It remained to be seen now how much social change these new governments would foster. Contrary to what white southerners would later claim, the Republican state governments did not disfranchise ex-Confederates as a group. James Lynch, a leading black politician from Mississippi, explained why African Americans shunned the “folly” of disfranchising whites. Unlike northerners who “can leave when it becomes too uncomfortable,” landless former slaves “must be in friendly relations with the great body of the whites in the state. Otherwise ... peace can be maintained only by a standing army.” Despised and lacking material or social power, southern Republicans strove for acceptance, legitimacy, and safe ways to gain a foothold in a depressed economy.

Far from being vindictive toward the race that had enslaved them, most southern blacks treated leading rebels with generosity and appealed to white southerners to adopt a spirit of fairness. In this way, the South's Republican Party condemned itself to defeat if white voters would not cooperate. Within a few years, most of the fledgling Republican parties in the southern states would be struggling for survival against violent white hostility. But for a time, some propertied whites accepted congressional Reconstruction as a reality.

### **Industrialization and Mill Towns**

Reflecting northern ideals and southern necessity, the Reconstruction governments enthusiastically promoted industry. Accordingly, Reconstruction legislatures encouraged investment with loans, subsidies, and short-term exemptions from taxation. The southern railroad system was rebuilt and expanded, and coal and iron mining made possible Birmingham's steel plants. Between 1860 and 1880, the number of manufacturing establishments in the South nearly doubled.

This emphasis on big business, however, produced higher state debts and taxes, drew money away from schools and other programs, and multiplied possibilities for corruption in state legislatures. The alliance between business and government took firm hold, often at the expense of the needs of common farmers and laborers. It also locked Republicans into a conservative strategy and doomed them to failure in building support among poorer whites.

Poverty remained the lot of vast numbers of southern whites. On a daily basis during the Reconstruction years, they had to subordinate politics to the struggle for livelihood. The war had caused a massive one-time loss of income-producing wealth, such as livestock, and a steep decline in land values. From 1860 to 1880, the South's share of per capita income fell from nearly equal to only 51 percent of the national average. In many regions, the old planter class still ruled the best land and access to credit or markets.

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As many poor whites and blacks found farming less tenable, they moved to cities and new mill towns. Industrialization did not sweep the South as it did the North, but it certainly laid deep roots. Attracting textile mills to southern towns became a competitive crusade. “Next to God,” shouted a North Carolina evangelist, “what this town needs is a cotton mill!” In 1860, the South counted some 10,000 mill workers; by 1880, the number grew to 16,741 and by the end of the century, to 97,559. In thousands of human dramas, poor southerners began the multigenerational journey from farmer to mill worker and other forms of low-income urban wage earner.

### Republicans and Racial Equality

Policies appealing to African American voters never went beyond equality before the law. In fact, the whites who controlled the southern Republican Party were reluctant to allow blacks a share of offices proportionate to their electoral strength. Aware of their weakness, black leaders did not push very far for revolutionary economic or social change. In every southern state, they led efforts to establish public schools, although they did not press for integrated facilities. In 1870, South Carolina passed the first comprehensive school law in the South. By 1875, 50 percent of black school-age children in that state were enrolled in school, and approximately one-third of the three thousand teachers were black.

Some African American politicians did fight for civil rights and integration. Many were from cities such as New Orleans or Mobile, where large populations of light-skinned free blacks had existed before the war. Their experience in such communities had made them sensitive to issues of status, and they spoke out for open and equal public accommodations. Laws requiring equal accommodations won passage, but they often went unenforced.

The vexing questions of land reform and enforcement of racial equality, however, all but overwhelmed the Republican governments. Land reform largely failed because in most states whites were in the majority, and former slaveowners controlled the best land and other sources of economic power. Economic progress was uppermost in the minds of most freedpeople. Black southerners needed land, and much land did fall into state hands for nonpayment of taxes. Such land was offered for sale in small lots. But most freedmen had too little cash to bid against investors or speculators. South Carolina established a land commission, but it could help only those with money to buy. Any widespread redistribution of land had to arise from Congress, which never supported such action.

### Myth of “Negro Rule”

Within a few years, as centrists in both parties met with failure, white hostility to congressional Reconstruction began to dominate. Some conservatives had always wanted to fight Reconstruction through pressure and racist propaganda. They put economic and social pressure on blacks: one black Republican reported that “my neighbors will not employ me, nor sell me a farthing’s worth of anything.” Charging that the South had been turned over to ignorant blacks, conservatives deplored “black domination,” which became a rallying cry for a return to white supremacy.

Such attacks were inflammatory propaganda and part of the growing myth of “Negro rule,” which would serve as a central theme in battles over the memory of Reconstruction. African Americans participated in politics but hardly dominated or controlled events. They were a majority in only two out of ten state constitutional writing conventions (transplanted northerners were a majority in one). In the state

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legislatures, only in the lower house in South Carolina did blacks ever constitute a majority. Sixteen blacks won seats in Congress before Reconstruction was over, but none was ever elected governor. Only eighteen served in a high state office, such as lieutenant governor, treasurer, superintendent of education, or secretary of state.

In all, some four hundred blacks served in political office during the Reconstruction era, a signal achievement by any standard. Although they never dominated the process, they established a rich tradition of government service and civic activism. Elected officials, such as Robert Smalls in South Carolina, labored tirelessly for cheaper land prices, better healthcare, access to schools, and the enforcement of civil rights for black people. For too long, the black politicians of Reconstruction were the forgotten heroes of this seedtime of America's long civil rights movement.

### **Carpetbaggers and Scalawags**

Conservatives also assailed the allies of black Republicans. Their propaganda denounced whites from the North as “carpetbaggers,” greedy crooks planning to pour stolen tax revenues into their sturdy luggage made of carpet material. Immigrants from the North, who held the largest share of Republican offices, were all tarred with this rhetorical brush.

In fact, most northerners who settled in the South had come seeking business opportunities, as schoolteachers, or to find a warmer climate; most never entered politics. Those who did enter politics generally wanted to democratize the South and to introduce northern ways, such as industry and public education. Carpetbaggers' ideals were tested by hard times and ostracism by white southerners.

Carpetbaggers' real actions never matched the sensational stereotypes, although by the mid-1870s even some northerners who soured on Reconstruction or despaired over southern violence endorsed the images. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a Union officer and commander of an African-American regiment during the Civil War, suggested that any Yankee politician who remained in the South by 1874 was, more likely than not, a “mean man,” a “scoundrel,” and “like Shakespeare's Shylock.” And that same year, the African-American editors of the *Christian Recorder* distanced themselves from carpetbaggers. The “corrupt political vampires who rob and cheat and prey upon the prejudices of our people” and “feed upon the political carcass of a prostrate state,” the paper insisted, were not black folks' allies. The white southern counterrevolutionaries seemed to be winning the propaganda war.

Conservatives also invented the term *scalawag* to discredit any native white southerner who cooperated with the Republicans. A substantial number of southerners did so, including some wealthy and prominent men. Most scalawags, however, were yeoman farmers, men from mountain areas and nonslaveholding districts who had been Unionists under the Confederacy. They saw that they could benefit from the education and opportunities promoted by Republicans. Sometimes banding together with freedmen, they pursued common class interests and hoped to make headway against the power of long-dominant planters. In the long run, however, the hope of such black-white coalitions floundered in the quicksand of racism.

### **Tax Policy and Corruption as Political Wedges**

Taxation was a major problem for the Reconstruction governments. Republicans wanted to repair the war's destruction, stimulate industry, and support such new ventures as public schools. But the Civil War had destroyed much of the South's

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tax base. One category of valuable property—slaves—had disappeared entirely. And hundreds of thousands of citizens had lost much of the rest of their property—money, livestock, fences, and buildings—to the war. Thus, an increase in taxes (sales, excise, and property) was necessary even to maintain traditional services. Inevitably, Republican tax policies aroused strong opposition, especially among the yeomen.

Corruption was another serious charge levied against the Republicans. Unfortunately, it was often true. Many carpetbaggers and black politicians engaged in fraudulent schemes, sold their votes, or padded expenses, taking part in what scholars recognize was a nationwide surge of corruption in an age ruled by “spoilsmen”. Corruption carried no party label, but the Democrats successfully pinned the blame on unqualified blacks and greedy carpetbaggers among southern Republicans.

### **Ku Klux Klan**

All these problems hurt the Republicans, whose leaders also allowed factionalism along racial and class lines to undermine party unity. But in many southern states, the deathblow came through violence. The Ku Klux Klan (its members altered the Greek word for “circle,” *kuklos*), a secret veterans’ club that began in Tennessee in 1866, spread through the South, and rapidly evolved into a terrorist organization. Violence against African Americans occurred from the first days of Reconstruction but became far more organized and purposeful after 1867. Klansmen sought to frustrate Reconstruction and keep the freedmen in subjection. Nighttime harassment, whippings, beatings, rapes, and murders became common, as terrorism dominated some counties and regions.

Although the Klan tormented blacks who stood up for their rights as laborers or individuals, its main purpose was political. Lawless nightriders made active Republicans the target of their attacks. Leading white and black Republicans were killed in several states. After freedmen who worked for a South Carolina scalawag started voting, terrorists visited the plantation and, in the words of one victim, “whipped every ... [black] man they could lay their hands on.” Klansmen also attacked Union League clubs—Republican organizations that mobilized the black vote—and schoolteachers who were aiding the freedmen.

Klan violence was not a spontaneous outburst of racism; very specific social forces shaped and directed it. In North Carolina, for example, Alamance and Caswell Counties were the sites of the worst Klan violence. Slim Republican majorities there rested on cooperation between black voters and white yeomen, particularly those whose Unionism or discontent with the Confederacy had turned them against local Democratic officials. Together, these black and white Republicans had ousted officials long entrenched in power. The wealthy and powerful men in Alamance and Caswell who had lost their accustomed political control were the Klan’s county officers and local chieftains. They organized a deliberate campaign of terror, recruiting members and planning atrocities. By intimidation and murder, the Klan weakened the Republican coalition and restored a Democratic majority.

Klan violence injured Republicans across the South. One of every ten black leaders who had been delegates to the 1867–1868 state constitutional conventions was attacked, seven fatally. In one judicial district of North Carolina, the Ku Klux Klan was responsible for twelve murders, over seven hundred beatings, and other acts of violence, including rape and arson. A single attack on Alabama Republicans in the town of Eutaw left four blacks dead and fifty-four wounded. In South Carolina, five hundred masked Klansmen lynched eight black prisoners at the Union County



jail, and in nearby York County, the Klan committed at least eleven murders and hundreds of whippings. According to historian Eric Foner, the Klan “made it virtually impossible for Republicans to campaign or vote in large parts of Georgia.”

Thus, a combination of difficult fiscal problems, Republican mistakes, racial hostility, and terror brought down the Republican regimes. In most southern states, Radical Reconstruction lasted only a few years (see Map 16.1). The most enduring failure of Reconstruction, however, was not political; it was social and economic. Reconstruction failed to alter the South’s social structure or its distribution of wealth and power.

## RETREAT FROM RECONSTRUCTION

During the 1870s, northerners increasingly lost the political will to sustain Reconstruction in the South as a vast economic and social transformation occurred in their own region as well as in the West. Radical Republicans like Albion Tourgée, a former Union soldier who moved to North Carolina and was elected a judge, condemned Congress’s timidity. Turning the freedman out on his own without protection, said Tourgée, constituted “cheap philanthropy.” Indeed, many African Americans believed that, during Reconstruction, the North “threw all the Negroes on the world without any way of getting along.” As the North underwent its own transformations and lost interest in the South’s dilemmas, Reconstruction collapsed.

### Political Implications of Klan Terrorism

In one southern state after another, Democrats regained control, and they threatened to defeat Republicans in the North as well. Whites in the old Confederacy referred to this decline of Reconstruction as “southern redemption,” and during the 1870s, “redeemer” Democrats claimed to be the saviors of the South from alleged “black domination” and “carpetbag rule.” And for one of only a few times in American history, violence and terror emerged as a tactic in normal politics.

In 1870 and 1871, the violent campaigns of the Ku Klux Klan forced Congress to pass two Enforcement Acts and an anti-Klan law. These laws made actions by individuals against the civil and political rights of others a federal criminal offense for the first time. They also provided for election supervisors and permitted martial law and suspension of the writ of habeas corpus to combat murders, beatings, and threats by the Klan. Federal prosecutors used the laws rather selectively. In 1872 and 1873, Mississippi and the Carolinas saw many prosecutions; but in other states where violence flourished, the laws were virtually ignored. Southern juries sometimes refused to convict Klansmen; out of a total of 3,310 cases, only 1,143 ended in convictions. Although many Klansmen (roughly 2,000 in South Carolina alone) fled their state to avoid prosecution, and the Klan officially disbanded, the threat of violence did not end. Paramilitary organizations known as Rifle Clubs and Red Shirts often took the Klan’s place.

Klan terrorism openly defied Congress, yet even on this issue there were ominous signs that the North’s commitment to racial justice was fading. Some conservative but influential Republicans opposed the anti-Klan laws. Rejecting other Republicans’ arguments that the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments had made the federal government the protector of the rights of citizens, these dissenters echoed an old Democratic charge that Congress was infringing on states’ rights. Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois declared that the states remained “the depositories of the rights of the individual.” If Congress could

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punish crimes like assault or murder, he asked, “what is the need of the State governments?” For years, Democrats had complained of “centralization and consolidation”; now some Republicans seemed to agree with them. This opposition foreshadowed a more general revolt within Republican ranks in 1872.

### **Industrial Expansion and Reconstruction in the North**

Both immigration and industrialization surged in the North. Between 1865 and 1873, 3 million immigrants entered the country, most settling in the industrial cities of the North and West. Within only eight years, postwar industrial production increased by 75 percent. For the first time, nonagricultural workers outnumbered farmers, and wage earners outnumbered independent craftsmen. And by 1873, only Britain’s industrial output was greater than that of the United States. Government financial policies did much to bring about this rapid growth. Low taxes on investment and high tariffs on manufactured goods aided the growth of a new class of powerful industrialists, especially railroad entrepreneurs.

Railroads became the symbol of and the stimulus for the American age of capital. From 1865 to 1873, thirty-five thousand miles of new track were laid, a total exceeding the entire national rail network of 1860. Railroad building fueled the banking industry and made Wall Street the center of American capitalism. Eastern railroad magnates, such as Thomas Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the largest corporation of its time, created economic empires with the assistance of huge government subsidies of cash and land. Railroad corporations also bought up mining operations, granaries, and lumber companies. In Congress and in every state legislature, big business now employed lobbyists to curry favor with government. Corruption ran rampant; some congressmen and legislators were paid annual retainers by major companies.

This soaring capitalist-political alliance led as well to an intensified struggle between labor and capital. As captains of industry amassed unprecedented fortunes in an age with no income tax, gross economic inequality polarized American society. The work force, worried a prominent Massachusetts business leader, was in a “transition state ... living in boarding houses” and becoming a “permanent factory population.” In Cincinnati, three large factories employed as many workers as the city’s thousands of small shops. In New York or Philadelphia, workers increasingly lived in dark, unhealthy tenement housing. Thousands would list themselves on the census as “common laborer” or “general jobber.” Many of the free labor maxims of the Republican Party were now under great duress. Did the individual work ethic guarantee social mobility in America or erode, under the pressure of profit making, into a world of unsafe factories, child labor, and declining wages? In 1868, the Republicans managed to pass an eight-hour workday bill in Congress that applied to federal workers. The “labor question” (see Chapter 18) now preoccupied northerners far more than the “southern” or the “freedmen” question.

Then, the Panic of 1873 ushered in over five years of economic contraction. Three million people lost their jobs as class attitudes diverged, especially in large cities. Debtors and the unemployed sought easy-money policies to spur economic expansion (workers and farmers desperately needed cash). Businessmen, disturbed by the widespread strikes and industrial violence that accompanied the panic, fiercely defended property rights and demanded “sound money” policies. The chasm between farmers and workers on the one hand, and wealthy industrialists on the other, grew ever wider.

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**Liberal Republican Revolt** Disenchanted with Reconstruction, a largely northern group calling itself the Liberal Republicans bolted the party in 1872 and nominated Horace Greeley, the famous editor of the *New York Tribune*, for president. The Liberal Republicans were a varied group, including foes of corruption and advocates of a lower tariff. Normally such disparate elements would not cooperate with one another, but two popular and widespread attitudes united them: distaste for federal intervention in the South and an elitist desire to let market forces and the “best men” determine policy and events.

The Democrats also gave their nomination to Greeley in 1872. The combination was not enough to defeat Grant, who won reelection, but it reinforced Grant’s desire to avoid confrontation with white southerners. Greeley’s campaign for North-South reunion, for “clasping hands across the bloody chasm,” was a bit premature to win at the polls but was a harbinger of the future in American politics. Organized Blue-Gray fraternalism (gatherings of Union and Confederate veterans) began as early as 1874. Grant continued to use military force sparingly and in 1875 refused a desperate request from the governor of Mississippi for troops to quell racial and political terrorism in that state.

Dissatisfaction with Grant’s administration grew during his second term. Strong-willed but politically naive, Grant made a series of poor appointments. His secretary of war, his private secretary, and officials in the Treasury and Navy Departments were involved in bribery or tax-cheating scandals. Instead of exposing the corruption, Grant defended the culprits. In 1874, as Grant’s popularity and his party’s prestige declined, the Democrats recaptured the House of Representatives, signaling the end of the Radical Republican vision of Reconstruction.

**General Amnesty** The effect of Democratic gains in Congress was to weaken legislative resolve on southern issues. Congress had already lifted the political disabilities of the Fourteenth Amendment from many former Confederates. In 1872, it had adopted a sweeping Amnesty Act, which pardoned most of the remaining rebels and left only five hundred barred from political office holding. In 1875, Congress passed a Civil Rights Act, partly as a tribute to the recently deceased Charles Sumner, purporting to guarantee black people equal accommodations in public places, such as inns and theaters, but the bill was watered down and contained no effective provisions for enforcement. (The Supreme Court later struck down this law.)

Democrats regained control of four state governments before 1872 and a total of eight by the end of January 1876 (see Map 16.1). In the North, Democrats successfully stressed the failure and scandals of Reconstruction governments. As opinion shifted, many Republicans sensed that their constituents were tiring of southern issues and the legacies of the war. Sectional reconciliation now seemed crucial for commerce. The nation was expanding westward rapidly, and the South was a new frontier for investment.

**The West, Race, and Reconstruction** Nowhere did the new complexity and violence of American race relations play out so vividly as in the West. As the Fourteenth Amendment and other enactments granted to blacks the beginnings of citizenship, other nonwhite peoples faced continued persecution. Across the West, the federal government pursued a policy of containment against Native Americans. In California, where white farmers and ranchers often

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forced Indians into captive labor, some civilians practiced a more violent form of “Indian hunting.” By 1880, thirty years of such violence left an estimated forty-five hundred California Indians dead at the hands of white settlers.

In Texas and the Southwest, the rhetoric of national expansion still deemed Mexicans and other mixed-race Hispanics to be debased, “lazy,” and incapable of self-government. And in California and other states of the Far West, thousands of Chinese immigrants became the victims of brutal violence. Few whites had objected to the Chinese who did the dangerous work of building railroads through the Rocky Mountains. But when the Chinese began to compete for urban, industrial jobs, great conflict emerged. Anticoolie clubs appeared in California in the 1870s, seeking laws against Chinese labor, fanning the flames of racism, and organizing vigilante attacks on Chinese workers and the factories that employed them. Western politicians sought white votes by pandering to prejudice, and in 1879 the new California constitution denied the vote to Chinese.

If we view America from coast to coast, and not merely on the North-South axis, the Civil War and Reconstruction years both dismantled racial slavery and fostered a volatile new racial complexity, especially in the West. During the same age when early anthropologists employed elaborate theories of “scientific” racism to determine a hierarchy of racial types, the West was a vast region of racial mixing and conflict. Some African Americans, despite generations of mixture with Native Americans, asserted that they were more like whites than the nomadic, “uncivilized” Indians, while others, like the Creek freedmen of Indian Territory, sought an Indian identity. In Texas, whites, Indians, blacks, and Hispanics had mixed for decades, and by the 1870s forced reconsideration in law and custom of who was white and who was not.

During Reconstruction, America was undergoing what one historian has called a reconstruction of the very idea of race itself. As it did so, tumbling into some of the darkest years of American race relations, the turbulence of the expanding West reinforced the new nationalism and the reconciliation of North and South based on a resurgent white supremacy.

**Foreign Expansion** Following the Civil War, pressure for expansion reemerged (see Chapter 22), and in 1867 Secretary of State William H. Seward arranged a vast addition of territory to the national domain through the purchase of Alaska from Russia. Opponents ridiculed Seward’s \$7.2 million venture, calling Alaska “Frigidia,” “the Polar Bear Garden,” and “Walrussia.” But Seward convinced important congressmen of Alaska’s economic potential, and other lawmakers favored the dawning of friendship with Russia.

Also in 1867, the United States took control of the Midway Islands, a thousand miles northwest of Hawai’i. And in 1870, President Grant tried unsuccessfully to annex the Dominican Republic. Seward and his successor, Hamilton Fish, also resolved troubling Civil War grievances against Great Britain. Through diplomacy they arranged a financial settlement of claims on Britain for damage done by the *Alabama* and other cruisers built in England and sold to the Confederacy. They recognized that sectional reconciliation in Reconstruction America would serve new ambitions for world commerce and expansion.

**Judicial Retreat from Reconstruction**

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court played its part in the northern retreat from Reconstruction. During the Civil War, the Court had been cautious and inactive. Reaction to the *Dred Scott*

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## LINKS TO THE WORLD

*The “Back to Africa” Movement*

In the wake of the Civil War, and especially after the despairing end of Reconstruction, some African Americans sought to leave the South for the American West or North, but also to relocate to Africa. Liberia had been founded in the 1820s by the white-led American Colonization Society (ACS), an organization dedicated to relocating blacks “back” in Africa. Some eleven thousand African Americans had emigrated voluntarily to Liberia by 1860, with largely disastrous results. Many died of disease, and others felt disoriented in the strange new land and ultimately returned to the United States.

Reconstruction reinvigorated the emigration impulse, especially in cotton-growing districts where blacks had achieved political power before 1870 but were crushed by violence and intimidation in the following decade. When blacks felt confident in their future, the idea of leaving America fell quiet; but when threatened or under assault, whole black communities dreamed of a place where they could become an independent “race,” a “people,” or a “nation” as their appeals often announced. Often that dream, more imagined than realized, lay in West Africa.

Before the Civil War, most blacks had denounced the ACS for its racism and its hostility to their sense of American birthright. But letters of inquiry flooded into the organization’s headquarters after 1875. Wherever blacks felt the reversal of the promise of emancipation the keenest, they formed local groups such as the Liberia Exodus Association of Pinesville, Florida; or the Liberian Exodus Arkansas Colony; and many others.

At emigration conventions, and especially in the churches, blacks penned letters to the ACS asking for maps or any information about a new African homeland. Some local

organizers would announce eighty or a hundred recruits “widawake for Liberia,” although such enthusiasm rarely converted into an Atlantic voyage. The impulse was genuine, however. “We wants to be a People,” wrote the leader of a Mississippi emigration committee; “we can’t be it heare and find that we ar compel to leve this Cuntry.” Henry Adams, a former Louisiana slave, Union soldier, and itinerant emigration organizer, advocated Liberia, but also supported “Kansas fever” with both Biblical and natural rights arguments. “God ... has a place and a land for all his people,” he wrote in 1879. “It is not that we think the soil climate or temperature” elsewhere is “more congenial to us— but it is the idea that pervades our breast ‘that at last we will be free,’ free from oppression, free from tyranny, free from bulldozing, murderous southern whites.”

By the 1890s, Henry McNeal Turner, a free-born former Georgia Reconstruction politician, and now Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, made three trips to Africa and vigorously campaigned through press and pulpit for blacks to “Christianize” and “civilize” Africa. Two shiploads of African Americans sailed to Liberia, although most returned disillusioned or ill. Turner’s plan of “Africa for the Africans” was as much a religious vision as an emigration system, but like all such efforts then and since, it reflected the despair of racial conditions in America more than realities in Africa. The numbers do not tell the tale of the depth of the impulse in this link to the world: in 1879–1880, approximately twenty-five thousand southern blacks moved to Kansas, whereas from 1865 to 1900, just under four thousand emigrated to West Africa.

decision (1857) had been so vehement, and the Union’s wartime emergency so great, that the Court had avoided interference with government actions. The justices breathed a collective sigh of relief, for example, when legal technicalities prevented them from reviewing the case of Clement Vallandigham, a Democratic opponent of

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Lincoln's war effort who had been convicted by a military tribunal of aiding the enemy. But in 1866, a similar case, *Ex parte Milligan*, reached the Court.

Lambdin P. Milligan of Indiana had plotted to free Confederate prisoners of war and overthrow state governments. For these acts, a military court sentenced Milligan, a civilian, to death. Milligan challenged the authority of the military tribunal, claiming he had a right to a civil trial. Reasserting its authority, the Supreme Court declared that military trials were illegal when civil courts were open and functioning.

In the 1870s, the Court successfully renewed its challenge to Congress's actions when it narrowed the meaning and effectiveness of the Fourteenth Amendment. The *Slaughter-House* cases (1873) began in 1869, when the Louisiana legislature granted one company a monopoly on the slaughtering of livestock in New Orleans. Rival butchers in the city promptly sued. Their attorney, former Supreme Court justice John A. Campbell, argued that Louisiana had violated the rights of some of its citizens in favor of others. The Fourteenth Amendment, Campbell contended, had revolutionized the constitutional system by bringing individual rights under federal protection, safeguarding them from state interference.

But in the *Slaughter-House* decision, the Supreme Court dealt a stunning blow to the scope of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court declared state citizenship and national citizenship separate. National citizenship involved only matters such as the right to travel freely from state to state, and only such narrow rights, held the Court, were protected by the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Supreme Court also concluded that the butchers who sued had not been deprived of their rights or property in violation of the due-process clause of the amendment. Shrinking from a role as "perpetual censor" for civil rights, the Court's majority declared that the framers of the recent amendments had not intended to "destroy" the federal system, in which the states exercised "powers for domestic and local government, including the regulation of civil rights." Thus, the justices severely limited the amendment's potential for securing and protecting the rights of black citizens—its original intent.

The next day, the Court decided *Bradwell v. Illinois*, a case in which Myra Bradwell, a female attorney, had been denied the right to practice law in Illinois because she was a married woman, and hence not considered a free agent. Pointing to the Fourteenth Amendment, Bradwell's attorneys contended the state had unconstitutionally abridged her "privileges and immunities" as a citizen. The Supreme Court rejected her claim, declaring a woman's "paramount destiny ... to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother."

In 1876, the Court weakened the Reconstruction era amendments even further by emasculating the enforcement clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and revealing deficiencies inherent in the Fifteenth Amendment. In *U.S. v. Cruikshank*, the Court overruled the conviction under the 1870 Enforcement Act of Louisiana whites who had attacked a meeting of blacks and conspired to deprive them of their rights. The justices ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment did not give the federal government power to act against these whites who had murdered possibly as many as one hundred blacks. The duty of protecting citizens' equal rights, the Court said, "rests alone with the States." Such judicial conservatism, practiced by justices, all of whom had been appointed by Republican presidents Lincoln and Grant, left a profound imprint down through the next century, blunting the revolutionary potential in the Civil War amendments.

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**Disputed Election of 1876 and Compromise of 1877**

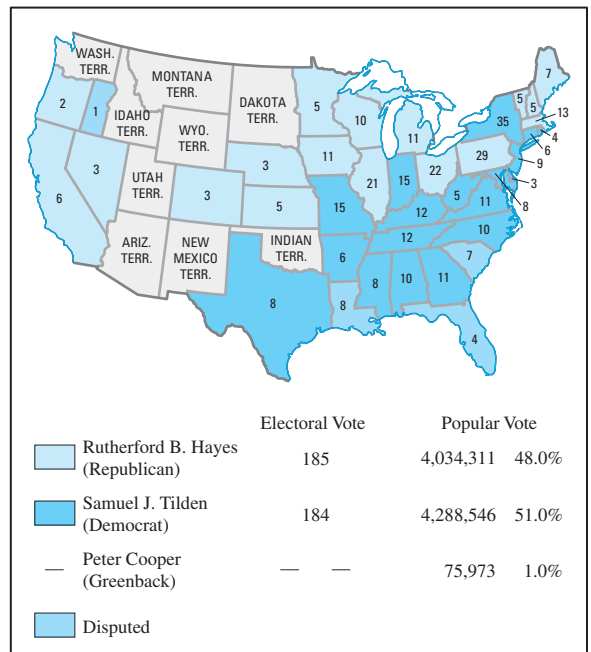
As the 1876 elections approached, most political observers saw that the nation was increasingly focused on economic issues and that the North was no longer willing to pursue the goals of Reconstruction. The results of a disputed presidential election confirmed this fact. Samuel J. Tilden, the Democratic governor of New York, ran strongly in the South and needed only one more electoral vote to triumph over Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republican nominee. Nineteen electoral votes from Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida (the only southern states not yet under Democratic rule) were disputed; both Democrats and Republicans claimed to have won in those states despite fraud committed by their opponents (see Map 16.2).

To resolve this unprecedented situation, Congress established a fifteen-member electoral commission. Membership on the commission was to be balanced between Democrats and Republicans. Because the Republicans held the majority in Congress, they prevailed, 8 to 7, on every attempt to count the returns, with commission members voting along strict party lines. Hayes would become president if Congress accepted the commission’s findings.

Congressional acceptance was not certain. Democrats controlled the House and could filibuster to block action on the vote. Many citizens worried that the nation would slip once again into civil war, as some southerners vowed, “Tilden or Fight!” The crisis was resolved when Democrats acquiesced in the election of Hayes based on a “deal” cut in a Washington hotel between Hayes’s supporters and southerners who wanted federal aid to railroads, internal improvements, federal patronage, and removal of troops from southern states. Northern and southern Democrats simply decided not to contest the election of a Republican who was not going to continue Reconstruction policies in the South. Thus, Hayes became president, inaugurated

**MAP 16.2 Presidential Election of 1876 and the Compromise of 1877**

In 1876, a combination of solid southern support and Democratic gains in the North gave Samuel Tilden the majority of popular votes, but Rutherford B. Hayes won the disputed election in the electoral college, after a deal satisfied Democratic wishes for an end to Reconstruction.



privately inside the White House to avoid any threat of violence. Southerners relished their promises of economic aid, and Reconstruction was unmistakably over.

Southern Democrats rejoiced, but African Americans grieved over the betrayal of their hopes for equality. The Civil War had brought emancipation, and Reconstruction had guaranteed their rights under law. But events and attitudes in larger white America were foreboding. In a Fourth of July speech in Washington, D.C., in 1875, Frederick Douglass anticipated this predicament. He reflected anxiously on the American centennial to be celebrated the following year. The nation, Douglass feared, would “lift to the sky its million voices in one grand Centennial hosanna of peace and good will to all the white race ... from gulf to lakes and from sea to sea.” Douglass looked back on fifteen years of unparalleled change for his people and worried about the hold of white supremacy on America’s historical memory: “If war among the whites brought peace and liberty to the blacks, what will peace among the whites bring?” Douglass’s question would echo down through American political culture for decades.

## SUMMARY

Reconstruction left a contradictory record. It was an era of tragic aspirations and failures but also of unprecedented legal, political, and social change. The Union victory brought about an increase in federal power, stronger nationalism, sweeping federal intervention in the southern states, and landmark amendments to the Constitution. But northern commitment to make these changes endure had eroded, and the revolution remained unfinished. The mystic sense of promise for new lives and liberties among the freedpeople, had eroded if not died.

The North embraced emancipation, black suffrage, and constitutional alterations strengthening the central government. But it did so to defeat the rebellion and secure the peace. As the pressure of these crises declined, Americans, especially in the North, retreated from Reconstruction. The American people and the courts maintained a preference for state authority and a distrust of federal power. The ideology of free labor dictated that property should be respected and that individuals should be self-reliant. Racism endured and transformed into the even more virulent forms of Klan terror and theories of black degeneration. Concern for the human rights of African Americans and other reforms frequently had less appeal than monymaking in an individualistic, industrializing society.

New challenges began to overwhelm the aims of Reconstruction. How would the country develop its immense resources in an increasingly interconnected national economy? Could farmers, industrial workers, immigrants, and capitalists coexist? Industrialization not only promised prosperity but also wrought increased exploitation of labor. Moreover, industry increased the nation’s power and laid the foundation for an enlarged American role in international affairs. The American imagination again turned to the conquest of new frontiers.

In the wake of the Civil War, Americans faced two profound tasks—the achievement of healing and the dispensing of justice. Both had to occur, but they never developed in historical balance. Making sectional reunion compatible with black freedom and equality overwhelmed the imagination in American political culture, and the nation still faced much of this dilemma more than a century later.

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# 17

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEST 1865–1900

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

- The Economic Activities of Native Peoples
- The Transformation of Native Cultures
- Life on the Natural Resource Frontier
- Irrigation and Transportation
- *LINKS TO THE WORLD The Australian Frontier*
- Farming the Plains
- The Ranching Frontier
- Summary

### THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF NATIVE PEOPLES

Native Americans settled the West long before other Americans migrated there. Neither passive nor powerless in the face of nature, Indians had been shaping their environment—for better and for worse—for centuries. Nevertheless, almost all native economic systems weakened in the late nineteenth century. Several factors explain why and how these declines happened.

#### **Subsistence Cultures**

Western Indian communities varied. Some natives inhabited permanent settlements; others lived in a series of temporary camps. Seldom completely isolated, most Indians were both participants and recipients in a flow of goods, culture, language, and disease carried by bands that migrated from one region to another. Regardless of their type of community, all Indians based their economy to differing degrees on four activities: crop growing; livestock raising; hunting, fishing, and gathering; and trading and raiding. Corn was the most common crop; sheep and horses, acquired from Spanish colonizers and from other Indians, were the livestock; and buffalo (American bison) were the primary prey of hunts. Indians raided one another for food, tools, and horses, which in turn they used in trading with other Indians and with whites. They also attacked to avenge wrongs and to oust competitors from hunting grounds. To achieve their standards of living, Indians tried to balance their economic systems. When a buffalo hunt failed, they subsisted on crops. When crops failed, they could still hunt buffalo and steal food and horses in a raid or trade livestock and furs for necessities.

## CHRONOLOGY

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>1862</b>    | Homestead Act grants free land to citizens who live on and improve the land<br>Morrill Land Grant Act gives states public land to sell in order to finance agricultural and industrial colleges |
| <b>1864</b>    | Chivington’s militia massacres Black Kettle’s Cheyennes at Sand Creek   |
| <b>1869</b>    | First transcontinental railroad completed   |
| <b>1872</b>    | Yellowstone becomes first national park   |
| <b>1876</b>    | Lakotas and Cheyennes ambush Custer’s federal troops at Little Big Horn, Montana  |
| <b>1877</b>    | Nez Percé Indians under Young Joseph surrender to U.S. troops   |
| <b>1878</b>    | Timber and Stone Act allows citizens to buy timberland cheaply but also enables large companies to acquire huge tracts of forest land   |
| <b>1879</b>    | Carlisle School for Indians established in Pennsylvania   |
| <b>1881–82</b> | Chinese Exclusion Acts prohibit Chinese immigration to the United States  |
| <b>1883</b>    | National time zones established   |
| <b>1884</b>    | U.S. Supreme Court first denies Indians as wards under government protection  |
| <b>1887</b>    | Dawes Severalty Act ends communal ownership of Indian lands and grants land allotments to individual native families  |
| <b>1887–88</b> | Devastating winter on Plains destroys countless livestock and forces farmers into economic hardship   |
| <b>1890</b>    | Final suppression of Plains Indians by U.S. Army at Wounded Knee<br>Census Bureau announces closing of the frontier<br>Yosemite National Park established                                       |
| <b>1892</b>    | Muir helps found Sierra Club  |
| <b>1902</b>    | Newlands Reclamation Act passed   |

For Indians on the Great Plains, whether nomads such as the Lakotas (“Sioux”) or village dwellers such as the Pawnees, everyday life focused on the buffalo. They cooked and preserved buffalo meat; fashioned hides into clothing, moccasins, and blankets; used sinew for thread and bowstrings; and carved tools from bones and horns. Buffalo were so valuable that Pawnees and Lakotas often fought over access to herds. Plains Indians also depended on horses, which they used for transportation and hunting, and as symbols of wealth. To provide food for their herds, Plains Indians altered the environment by periodically setting fire to tall-grass prairies. The fires burned away dead plants, facilitating growth of new grass in the spring so that horses could feed all summer.

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In the Southwest, Indians led varying lifestyles, depending on the environment. For example, among the O'odham of southeastern Arizona and northwest Mexico, whose name translates into "The People," some groups grew irrigated crops in the few river valleys while those who inhabited the mountainous and desert regions followed more of a hunter-gatherer existence. Once foreigners arrived, The People traded for what was useful—tools, cloth, tobacco, livestock—and aided in raids against the Apache, who were enemies of both whites and O'odham. (Significantly, the Apache called themselves Nnee, which also meant "The People.") The Navaho (or Dine', also meaning "The People") were herders, whose sheep, goats, and horses provided status and security.

What buffalo were to Plains Indians and sheep were to southwestern Indians, salmon were to Indians of the Northwest. Before the mid-nineteenth century, the Columbia River and its tributaries supported the densest population of native peoples in North America, all of whom fished for salmon in the summer and stored dried fish for the winter. To harvest fish, the Clatsops, Klamath, and S'Klallams developed technologies of stream diversion, platform construction over the water, and special baskets. Like natives of other regions, many of these Indians traded for horses, buffalo robes, beads, cloth, and knives.



Denver Public Library, Western History Division

*Horses, sometimes numbering more than one hundred, and women and children, usually twenty or thirty, were a liability as well as a help to a Plains Indian camp. The horses competed with buffalo for valuable pasturage, and the women and children made camps vulnerable when white soldiers attacked.*

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### Slaughter of Buffalo

On the Plains and in parts of the Southwest, native worlds began to dissolve after 1850, when white migrants entered and competed with Indians for access to and control over natural resources. Perceiving buffalo and Indians as hindrances to their ambitions, whites endeavored to eliminate both. The U.S. Army refused to enforce treaties that reserved hunting grounds for exclusive Indian use, so railroads sponsored buffalo hunts in which eastern sportsmen shot at the bulky targets from slow-moving trains. Some hunters collected from \$1 to \$3 from tanneries for hides that were sent east for use mainly as belts to drive industrial machinery; others did not even stop to pick up their kill.

Unbeknownst to both Indians and whites, however, a complex combination of circumstances had already doomed the buffalo before the slaughter of the late 1800s. Natives themselves contributed to the depletion of the herds by increasing their kills, especially to trade hides with whites and other Indians. Also, a period of generally dry years in the 1840s and 1850s had forced Indians to set up camps in river basins, where they competed with buffalo for space and water. As a result, the buffalo were pushed out of nourishing grazing territory and faced threats of starvation. When whites arrived on the Plains, they, too, sought to settle in the same river basin areas, further forcing buffalo away from nutritious grasslands. At the same time, lethal animal diseases, such as anthrax and brucellosis, brought in by white-owned livestock, decimated buffalo already weakened by malnutrition and drought. Increasing numbers of horses, oxen, and sheep, owned by white newcomers as well as by some Indians, also upset the buffalo's grazing patterns by devouring grasses they depended on at certain times of the year. In sum, human and environmental shocks created vulnerability among the buffalo, to which mass killing only struck the final blow. By the 1880s, only a few hundred of the 25 million buffalo estimated on the Plains in 1820 remained.

### Decline of Salmon

In the Northwest, the basic wild source of Indian food supply, salmon, suffered a fate similar to that of the buffalo, but for different reasons. White commercial fishermen and canneries moved into the Columbia and Willamette River valleys during the 1860s and 1870s, and they harvested increasing numbers of salmon running upriver to spawn before laying their eggs, so the fish supply was not being replenished. By the 1880s, they had greatly diminished salmon runs on the Columbia, and by the early 1900s, construction of dams on the river and its tributaries further impeded the salmon's ability to reproduce. The U.S. government protected Indian fishing rights, but not the supply of fish on the river. Hatcheries helped restore some of this supply, but dams built to provide power, combined with overfishing and pollution, diminished salmon stocks.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF NATIVE CULTURES

Buffalo slaughter and salmon reduction undermined Indian subsistence, but a unique mix of human demography contributed as well. For most of the nineteenth century, white populations that migrated into western lands inhabited by Indians

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were overwhelmingly young and male. In 1870, white men outnumbered white women by three to two in California, two to one in Colorado, and two to one in Dakota Territory. By 1900, preponderances of men remained throughout these places. Most of these males were unmarried and in their twenties and thirties, the stage of life when they were most prone to violent behavior. In other words, the whites with whom Indians were most likely to come into contact first were traders, trappers, soldiers, prospectors, and cowboys—almost all of whom owned guns and had few qualms about using their weapons against animals and humans who got in their way.

**Western Men** Moreover, these men subscribed to prevailing attitudes that Indians were primitive, lazy, devious, and cruel. Such contempt made exploiting and killing natives all the easier, and whites often justified violence against Indians by claiming preemptive defense of threats to life and property. When Indians raided white settlements, they sometimes mutilated bodies, burned buildings, and kidnapped women, acts that were embellished in campfire stories, pamphlets, and popular fiction—all of which reinforced images of Indians as savages. Inside the bachelor society of saloons and cabins, men boasted of their exploits in Indian fighting and showed off trophies of scalps and other body parts taken from victims.

Indian warriors, too, were young, armed, and prone to violence. Valuing bravery and vengeance, they boasted of fighting white interlopers. But Indian communities contrasted with those of whites in that they contained excesses of women, the elderly, and children, making native bands less mobile and therefore vulnerable to attack. They also were susceptible to bad habits of bachelor white society. Indians copied white males' behavior of bingeing on cheap whiskey and indulging in prostitution. The syphilis and gonorrhea that Indian men contracted from Indian women infected by white men killed many and reduced natives' ability to reproduce, a consequence that their populations, already declining from smallpox and other diseases spread by whites, could not afford. Thus, the age and gender structure of the white frontier population, combined with attitudes of racial contempt, created a further threat to western Indians' existence.

### **Government Policy and Treaties**

Government policy reinforced efforts to remove Indians from the path of white ambitions, but the organization of Indian groups caused confusion. North American natives were organized not so much into tribes, as whites believed, as into countless bands and confederacies in the Plains and villages in the Southwest and Northwest. Some two hundred languages and dialects separated these groups, making it difficult for Indians to unite against white invaders. Although a language group could be defined as a tribe, separate bands and clans within each group had their own leaders, and seldom did a chief hold widespread power. Moreover, bands often spent more time battling among themselves than with white settlers.

Nevertheless, the U.S. government needed some way of categorizing Indians so as to fashion a policy toward them. It did so by imputing more meaning to tribal organization than was warranted. After 1795, American officials considered Indian

tribes to be separate nations with which they could make treaties that ensured peace and defined boundaries between Indian and white lands. This was a faulty assumption because chiefs who agreed to a treaty did not always speak for all members of a band and the group would not necessarily abide by an agreement. Moreover, white settlers seldom accepted treaties as guarantees of Indians' land rights. On the Plains, whites assumed they could settle wherever they wished, and they rarely hesitated to commandeer choice farmland along river basins. In the Northwest, whites considered treaties protecting Indians' fishing rights on the Columbia River to be nuisances and ousted Indians from the best locations so that they could use mechanical devices to harvest fish. As white migrants pressed into Indian territories, treaties made one week were violated the next.

### Reservation Policy

Prior to the 1880s, the federal government tried to force western Indians onto reservations, where, it was thought, they could be “civilized.” Reservations usually consisted of those areas of a group's previous territory that were least desirable to whites. When assigning Indians to such parcels, the government promised protection from white encroachment and agreed to provide food, clothing, and other necessities.

Reservation policy helped make way for the market economy. In the early years of contact in the West, trade had benefited both Indians and whites and had taken place on a nearly equal footing, much as it had between eastern Indians and whites in the preceding century. Indians acquired clothing, guns, and horses from whites in return for furs, jewelry, and, sometimes, military assistance against other Indians. In the West, however, whites' needs and economic power grew disproportionate to Indians' needs and power. Indians became more dependent, and whites increasingly dictated what was to be traded and on what terms. For example, white traders persuaded Navajo weavers in the Southwest to produce heavy rugs suitable for eastern customers and to adopt new designs and colors to boost sales. Meanwhile, Navajos raised fewer crops and were forced to buy food because the market economy undermined their subsistence agriculture. Soon they were selling land and labor to whites as well, and their dependency made it easier to force them onto reservations.

Reservation policy had degrading consequences. First, Indians had no say over their own affairs on reservations. Supreme Court decisions in 1884 and 1886 defined them as wards (falling, like helpless children, under government protection) and denied them the right to become U.S. citizens. Thus, they were unprotected by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which had extended to African Americans the privileges and legal protections of citizenship. Second, pressure from white farmers, miners, and herders who continually sought Indian lands made it difficult for the government to preserve reservations intact. Third, the government ignored native history, even combining on the same reservation Indian bands that habitually had warred against each other. Rather than serving as civilizing communities, reservations weakened every aspect of Indian life, except the resolve to survive.

### Native Resistance

Not all Indians succumbed to market forces and reservation restrictions. Apache bands long had raided white settlements in the Southwest and continued their insurgency even after

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most of their people had been forced onto reservations. Their raiding ended only after the last of their leaders, the Chiricahua chief Geronimo, was captured in 1886. Pawnees in the Midwest resisted the disadvantageous deals that white traders tried to impose on them. In the Northwest, Nez Percé Indians defied being forced onto a reservation by fleeing to Canada in 1877. They successfully eluded U.S. troops and their Crow and Cheyenne scouts over 1,800 miles of rugged terrain, but when they reached Montana, their leader, Young Joseph, decided they could not succeed, and he ended the flight. Sent to a reservation, Joseph repeatedly petitioned the government to return his peoples' ancestral lands, but his appeals went unheeded.

As they had done earlier in the East, whites responded to western Indian defiance with military aggression. The attitude of many resembled that of an Arizona journalist who wrote, "extermination is our only hope, and the sooner the better." In 1860, for example, Navajos, reacting to U.S. military pressure, carried out a destructive raid on Fort Defiance in Arizona Territory. In reprisal, the army eventually attacked and starved the Navajo into submission, destroying their fields, houses, and livestock, and in 1863–1864 forced them on a "Long Walk" from their homelands to a reservation at Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. Also in 1864, in order to eliminate natives who blocked white ambitions in the Sand Creek region of Colorado, a militia commanded by Methodist minister John Chivington attacked a Cheyenne band led by Black Kettle, killing almost every Indian. In 1879, four thousand U.S. soldiers forced a surrender from Utes who already had given up most of their ancestral territory in western Colorado but were resisting further concessions.

The most publicized battle occurred in June 1876, when 2,500 Lakotas and Cheyennes led by Chiefs Rain-in-the-Face, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse surrounded and annihilated 256 government troops led by the rash Colonel George A. Custer near the Little Big Horn River in southern Montana. Although Indians consistently demonstrated military skill in such battles, shortages of supplies and relentless pursuit by U.S. soldiers, including African American units of Union Army veterans called Buffalo Soldiers (so named by the Cheyennes and Comanches they fought), eventually overwhelmed armed Indian resistance. Native Americans were not so much conquered in battle as they were harassed and starved into submission.

### **Reform of Indian Policy**

In the 1870s and 1880s, reformers and government officials sought more purposely than in the past to "civilize" and "uplift" natives through landholding and education. This meant changing native identities and outlawing customs deemed to be "savage and barbarous." In this regard, the United States copied imperialist policies of other nations, such as the French, who banned native religious ceremonies in their Pacific island colonies, and the British, who jailed African religious leaders. The American government determined to persuade Indians to abandon their traditional cultures and adopt presumed American values of ambition, thrift, and materialism.

At the same time, other groups argued for sympathetic—and sometimes patronizing—treatment. Reform treatises, such as George Manypenny's *Our Indian*

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*Wards* (1880) and Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), plus unfavorable comparison with Canada's management of Indian affairs aroused the American conscience. Canada had granted native peoples the rights of British subjects and proceeded more slowly than the United States in efforts to acculturate Indians. A high rate of intermarriage between Indians and Canadian whites also promoted smoother relations.

In the United States, the most active Indian reform organizations were the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA) and the Indian Rights Association (IRA). The WNIA sought to use women's domestic skills of nurture and compassion to help people in need and urged gradual assimilation of Indians. The IRA, which was more influential but numbered few Native Americans among its members, advocated citizenship and landholding by individual Indians. Most reformers believed Indians were culturally inferior to whites and assumed Indians could succeed economically only if they embraced middle-class values of diligence and education.

Reformers particularly deplored Indians' sexual division of labor. Native women seemed to do all the work—tending crops, raising children, cooking, curing hides, making tools and clothes—while being servile to men, who hunted but were otherwise idle. Ignoring the fact that white men sometimes mistreated white women, groups such as the WNIA and IRA wanted Indian men to bear more responsibilities; treat Indian women more respectfully; and resemble male heads of white, middle-class households. But when Indian men and women adopted this model of white society, in which women were supposed to be submissive and private, Indian women lost much of the economic independence and power over daily life that they once had.

### Zitkala-Sa

Some exceptional Indians managed to use white-controlled education to their advantage. Zitkala-Sa (Red Bird) was a Yankton Sioux born on Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota in 1876. At age twelve, she was sent to a Quaker boarding school in Indiana and later attended Earlham College and the Boston Conservatory of Music. She became an accomplished orator and violinist, but her major contribution was her writing on behalf of her people's needs and the preservation of their cultures. In 1901, Zitkala-Sa published *Old Indian Legends*, in which she translated Sioux oral tradition into stories. She wrote other pieces for *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly* and served in various capacities on the Standing Rock and Ute reservations. In 1902, Zitkala-Sa married a mixed-race army captain who had taken the name Ray Bonnin and became known as Gertrude Bonnin. Subsequently, she was elected the first full-blooded Indian secretary of the Society of American Indians and served as editor of *American Indian Magazine*, all the while advocating for Indian rights.

### Dawes Severalty Act

In 1887, Congress reversed its reservation policy and passed the Dawes Severalty Act. The act, supported by reformers, authorized dissolution of community-owned Indian property and granted land allotments to individual Indian families. The government held that land in trust for twenty-five years, so families could not sell their allotments. The law also awarded citizenship to all who accepted allotments (an act of

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Congress in 1906 delayed citizenship for those Indians who had not yet taken their allotment). It also entitled the government to sell unallocated land to whites.

Indian policy, as implemented by the Interior Department, now took on two main features, both of which aimed at assimilating Indians into white American culture. First and foremost, as required by the Dawes Act, the government distributed reservation land to individual families in the belief that the American institution of private property would create productive citizens and integrate Indians into the larger society. As one official stated, the goal was to “weaken and destroy [Indians’] tribal relations and individualize them by giving each a separate home and having them subsist by industry.” Second, officials believed that Indians would abandon their “barbaric” habits more quickly if their children were educated in boarding schools away from the reservations.

The Dawes Act represented a Euro-American and Christian world-view, an earnest but narrow belief that a society of families headed by men was the most desired model. Government agents and reformers were joined by educators who viewed schools as tools to create a patriotic, industrious citizenry. Using the model of Hampton Institute, founded in Virginia in 1869 to educate newly freed slaves, educators helped establish the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania in 1879, which served as the flagship of the government’s Indian school system. In keeping with European American custom, the boarding schools imposed white-defined sex roles: boys were taught farming and carpentry, and girls learned sewing, cleaning, and cooking.

**Ghost Dance** In 1890, the government made one last show of force. With active resistance suppressed, some Lakotas and other groups turned to the religion of the Ghost Dance as a spiritual means of preserving native culture. Inspired by a Paiute prophet named Wovoka, the Ghost Dance consisted of movement in a circle until dancers reached a trancelike state and envisioned dead ancestors who, dancers believed, heralded a day when buffalo would return and all elements of white civilization, including guns and whiskey, would be buried. The Ghost Dance expressed this messianic vision in a ritual involving several days of dancing and meditation.

Ghost Dancers forswore violence but appeared threatening when they donned sacred shirts they believed would repel the white man’s bullets. As the religion spread, government agents became alarmed about the possibility of renewed Indian uprisings. Charging that the cult was anti-Christian, the army began arresting Ghost Dancers. Late in 1890, the government sent the Seventh Cavalry, Custer’s old regiment, to detain Lakotas moving toward Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Although the Indians were starving and seeking shelter, the army assumed they were armed for revolt. Overtaking the band at a creek called Wounded Knee, the troops massacred an estimated three hundred men, women, and children in the snow.

**The Losing of the West** Indian wars and the Dawes Act effectively accomplished what whites wanted and Indians feared: it reduced native control over land. Eager speculators induced Indians to sell their newly acquired property, in spite of federal safeguards against such practices.

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Between 1887 and the 1930s, native landholdings dwindled from 138 million acres to 52 million. Land-grabbing whites were particularly cruel to the Ojibwas of the northern plains. In 1906, Senator Moses E. Clapp of Minnesota attached to an Indian appropriations bill a rider declaring that mixed-blood adults on the White Earth reservation were “competent” (meaning educated in white ways) enough to sell their land without having to observe the twenty-five-year waiting period stipulated in the Dawes Act. When the bill became law, speculators duped many Ojibwas into signing away their land in return for counterfeit money and worthless merchandise. The Ojibwas lost more than half their original holdings, and economic ruin overtook them.

Government policy had other injurious effects on Indians’ ways of life. The boarding-school program enrolled thousands of children and tried to teach them that their inherited customs were inferior, but most returned to their families demoralized rather than ready to assimilate into white society. Polingaysi Qoyawayma, a Hopi woman forced to take the Christian name Elizabeth Q. White, recalled after four years spent at the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, “As a Hopi, I was misunderstood by the white man; as a convert of the missionaries, I was looked upon with suspicion by the Hopi people.”

Ultimately, political and ecological crises overwhelmed most western Indian groups. White violence and military superiority alone did not defeat them. Their economic systems had started to break down before the military campaigns occurred. Buffalo extinction, enemy raids, and disease combined to hobble subsistence culture to the point where Native Americans had no alternative but to yield their lands to market-oriented whites. Believing their culture superior, whites determined to transform Indians into successful farmers by teaching them the value of private property; educating them in American ideals; and eradicating their “backward” languages, lifestyles, and religions. Although Indians tried to retain their culture by adapting to the various demands they faced, by the end of the century they had lost control of the land and were under increasing pressure to shed their group identity. The West was won at their expense, and to this day they remain casualties of an aggressive age.

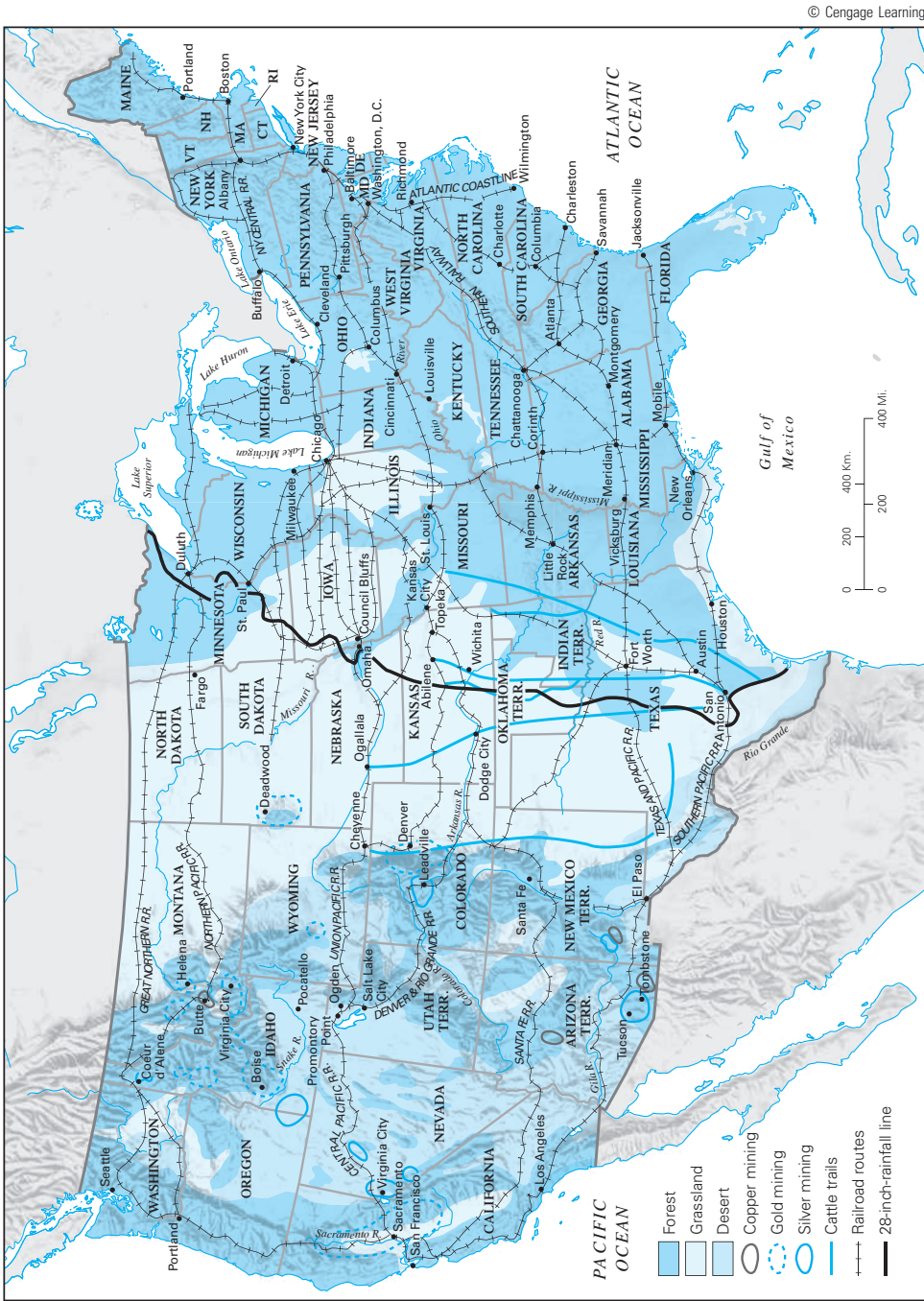
## LIFE ON THE NATURAL RESOURCE FRONTIER

In contrast to Indians, who used natural resources to meet subsistence needs and small-scale trading, most whites who migrated to the West and Great Plains were driven by the desire for material success. To their eyes, the vast stretches of territory lay as untapped sources of wealth that could bring about a better life (see Map 17.1). Extraction of these resources advanced settlement and created new markets at home and abroad; it also fueled revolutions in transportation, agriculture, and industry that swept across the United States in the late nineteenth century. This same extraction of nature’s wealth also gave rise to wasteful interaction with the environment and fed habits of racial and sexual oppression.

### Mining and Lumbering

In the mid-1800s, eager prospectors began to comb western terrain for gold, silver, copper, and other minerals. The mining frontier advanced rapidly, drawing thousands of

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**MAP 17.1 The Development and Natural Resources of the West**

By 1890, mining, lumbering, and cattle ranching had penetrated many areas west of the Mississippi River, and railroad construction had linked together the western economy. These activities, along with the spread of mechanized agriculture, altered both the economy and the people who were involved in them.

people to Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Colorado. California, where a gold rush helped populate a thriving state by 1850, furnished many of the miners, who traveled to nearby states in search of riches. Others seeking mineral riches followed traditional routes, moving from the East and Midwest to western mining regions.

Prospectors tended to be restless optimists, willing to climb mountains and trek across deserts in search of a telltale glint of precious metal. They shot game for food and financed their explorations by convincing merchants to advance credit for equipment in return for a share of the as-yet-undiscovered lode. Unlucky prospectors whose credit ran out took jobs and saved up for another search.

Digging up and transporting minerals was extremely expensive, so prospectors who did discover veins of metal seldom mined them. Instead, they sold their claims to large mining syndicates, such as the Anaconda Copper Company. Financed by eastern capital, these companies brought in engineers, heavy machinery, railroad lines, and work crews, and helped boost populations in cities such as El Paso and Tucson. In doing so, they made western mining corporate, just like eastern manufacturing. Although discoveries of gold and silver sparked national publicity, mining companies usually exploited less romantic but equally lucrative bonanzas of lead, zinc, tin, quartz, and copper.

Unlike mining, cutting trees for lumber to satisfy demands for construction and heating materials required vast tracts of forest land to be profitable. Because tree supplies in the upper Midwest and South had been depleted—aided by such inventions as bandsaws and feeding machines, which quickened the pace of timber cutting—lumber corporations moved into the forests of the Northwest. They often grabbed millions of acres under the Timber and Stone Act, passed by Congress in 1878 to stimulate settlement in California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. It allowed private citizens to buy, at a low price, 160-acre plots “unfit for cultivation” and “valuable chiefly for timber.” Lumber companies hired seamen from waterfront boarding houses to register claims to timberland and then transfer those claims to the companies. By 1900 private citizens had bought over 3.5 million acres, but most of that land belonged to corporations.

While mining corporations were excavating western mineral deposits and lumber corporations were cutting down Northwest timberlands, oil companies were beginning to drill wells in the Southwest. In 1900, most of the nation’s petroleum still came from the Appalachians and the Midwest, but rich oil reserves had been discovered in southern California and eastern Texas, creating not only new wealth but also boosting boom cities, such as Los Angeles and Houston. Although oil and kerosene were still used mostly for lubrication and lighting, oil discovered in the Southwest later became a vital new source of fuel for autos and other machines.

### Complex Communities

As the West developed, it became a rich multiracial society, including not only Native Americans and white migrants but also Mexicans, African Americans, and Asians, all involved in a process of community building. A crescent of territory, a borderland stretching from western Texas through New Mexico and Arizona to northern California, but also including Mexico, supported ranchers and shepherders, descendants of the Spanish who had originally claimed the land. In New Mexico, Spaniards mixed

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with Indians to form a *mestizo* population of small farmers and ranchers. All along the Southwest frontier, Mexican immigrants moved into American territory to find work. Some returned to Mexico seasonally; others stayed. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) had guaranteed property rights to Hispanics, “Anglo” (the Mexican name for a white American) miners, speculators, and railroads used fraud and other means to steal much of Hispanic landholdings. As a result, many Mexicanos moved to cities such as San Antonio and Tucson, and became wage laborers.

Before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, some 200,000 Chinese—mostly young, single males—entered the United States and built communities in California, Oregon, and Washington. Many came with five-year contracts to work on railroad construction, then return home, presumably with resources for a better life. They also labored in the fields. By the 1870s, Chinese composed half of California’s agricultural work force. The state’s farms and citrus groves demanded a huge migrant work force, and Chinese laborers moved from one ripening crop to another, working as pickers and packers. In cities such as San Francisco, they labored in textile and cigar factories, and lived in large boarding houses. Few married because Chinese women were scarce.

Like Chinese and Mexicans, Japanese and European immigrants moved from place to place as they worked in mining and agricultural communities. The region consequently developed its own migrant economy, with workers shifting communities within a large geographical area as they took short-term jobs in mining, farming, and railroad construction.

African Americans tended to be more settled, many of them “exodusters” who built all-black western towns. Nicodemus, Kansas, for example, was founded in 1877 by black migrants from Lexington, Kentucky, and grew to six hundred residents within two years. Early experiences were challenging, but eventually the town developed newspapers, shops, churches, a hotel, and a bank. When attempts to obtain railroad connections failed, however, the town declined, as many of its businesses moved across the Solomon River to the town of Bogue, where a Union Pacific Railroad camp was located.

The major exodus occurred in 1879, when some six thousand blacks, many of them former slaves, moved from the South to Kansas, aided by the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association. Other migrants, encouraged by editors and land speculators, went to Oklahoma Territory. In the 1890s and early 1900s, African American settlers founded thirty-two all-black communities in Oklahoma, and the territory boasted several successful black farmers.

**Western Women** Although unmarried men numerically dominated the western natural-resource frontier, many communities contained populations of white women who had come for the same reason as men: to make their fortune. But on the mining frontier as elsewhere, women’s independence was limited; they usually accompanied a husband or father and seldom prospected themselves. Even so, many women used their labor as a resource and earned money by cooking and laundering and, in some cases, providing sexual services for miners in houses of prostitution. In the Northwest, they worked in canneries, cleaning and

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salting the fish their husbands caught. Mexicano women took jobs in cities as laundresses and seamstresses.

A number of white women helped to bolster family and community life as members of the home mission movement. Protestant missions had long sponsored benevolent activities abroad, such as in China, and had aided the settlement of Oregon in the 1830s and 1840s. But in the mid-nineteenth century, some women broke away from male-dominated missionary organizations. Using the slogan “Woman’s work for women,” they exerted moral authority in the West by establishing missionary societies and aiding women—unmarried mothers, Mormons, Indians, and Chinese—who they believed had fallen prey to men or who had not yet accepted the principles of Christian virtue.

### Significance of Race

To control labor and social relations within this complex population, white settlers made race an important distinguishing characteristic. They usually classified people into five races: Caucasians (themselves), Indians, Mexicans (both Mexican Americans, who had originally inhabited western lands, and Mexican immigrants), “Mongolians” (a term applied to Chinese), and “Negroes.” In applying these categories, whites imposed racial distinctions on people who, with the possible exception of African Americans, had never before considered themselves a “race.” Whites using these categories ascribed demeaning characteristics to others, judging them to be permanently inferior. In 1878, for example, a federal judge in California ruled that Chinese could not become U.S. citizens because they were not “white persons.”

Racial minorities in western communities occupied the bottom segment of a two-tiered labor system. Whites dominated the top tier of managerial and skilled labor positions, while Irish, Chinese, Mexican, and African American laborers held unskilled positions. All non-Anglo groups, in addition to the Irish, encountered prejudice, especially as dominant whites tried to reserve for themselves whatever riches the West might yield. Anti-Chinese violence erupted during hard times. When the Union Pacific Railroad tried to replace white workers with lower-waged Chinese in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1885, whites invaded and burned down the Chinese part of town, killing twenty-eight. Mexicans, many of whom had been the original owners of the land in California and elsewhere, saw their property claims ignored or stolen by white miners and farmers.

The multiracial quality of western communities, however, also included a cross-racial dimension. Because so many white male migrants were single, intermarriage with Mexican and Indian women was common. Such unions were acceptable for white men, but not for white women, especially where Asian immigrants were involved. Most miscegenation laws passed by western legislatures were intended to prevent Chinese and Japanese men from marrying white women.

### Conservation Movement

As whites were wresting ownership of the land from Indian and Mexican inhabitants of the West, questions arose over who should control the nation’s animal, mineral, and timber resources. Much of the undeveloped territory west of the Mississippi was in the public domain, and some people believed the federal government, as its owner,

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should limit its exploitation. Others, however, believed their own and the nation's prosperity depended on unlimited use of the land.

Questions about natural resources caught Americans between a desire for progress and a fear of spoiling nature. After the Civil War, people eager to protect the natural landscape began to organize a conservation movement. Sports hunters, concerned about loss of wildlife, opposed commercial hunting and lobbied state legislatures to pass hunting regulations. Artists and tourists in 1864 persuaded Congress to preserve the beautiful Yosemite Valley by granting it to the state of California, which reserved it for public use. Then, in 1872, Congress designated the Yellowstone River region in Wyoming as the first national park. And in 1891, conservationists, led by naturalist John Muir, pressured Congress to authorize President Benjamin Harrison to create forest reserves—public lands protected from private timber companies.

Such policies met with strong objections from lumber companies, lumber dealers, railroads, and householders accustomed to cutting timber freely for fuel and building material. Despite Muir's activism and efforts by the Sierra Club (which Muir helped found in 1892) and by such corporations as the Southern Pacific Railroad, which supported rational resource development, opposition was loudest in the West, where people remained eager to take advantage of nature's bounty. Ironically, however, by prohibiting trespass in areas such as Yosemite and Yellowstone, conservation policy deprived Indians and white settlers of the wildlife, water, and firewood they had previously taken from federal lands.

### Admission of New States

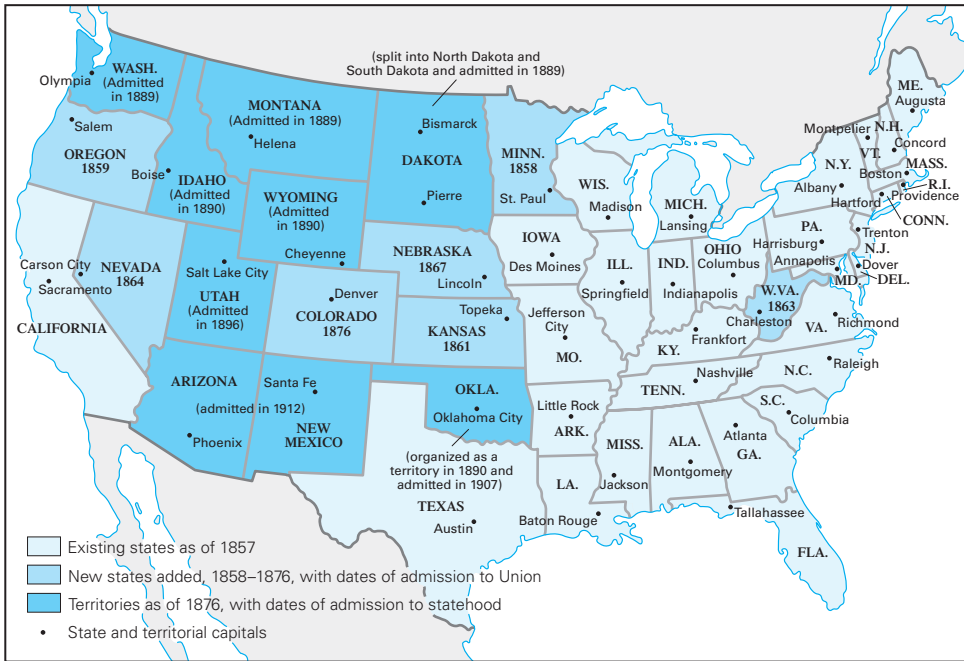
Development of mining and forest regions, as well as of farms and cities, brought western territories to the economic and population threshold of statehood (see Map 17.2). In 1889, Republicans seeking to solidify control of Congress passed an omnibus bill granting statehood to North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, and Montana. Wyoming and Idaho, both of which allowed women to vote, were admitted the following year. Congress denied statehood to Utah until 1896, wanting assurances from the Mormons, who constituted a majority of the territory's population and controlled its government, that they would prohibit polygamy.

Western states' varied communities spiced American folk culture and fostered a "go-getter" optimism that distinguished the American spirit. The lawlessness and hedonism of places such as Deadwood, in Dakota Territory, and Tombstone, in Arizona Territory, gave their region notoriety and romance. Legends, only partly true, arose about characters whose lives both typified and magnified the western experience, and promoters such as folk character Buffalo Bill enhanced the appeal of western folklore.

### Western Folk Heroes

Arizona's mining towns, with their free-flowing cash and loose law enforcement, attracted gamblers, thieves, and opportunists whose names came to stand for the Wild West. Near Tombstone, the infamous Clanton family and their partner John Ringgold (Johnny Ringo) engaged in smuggling and cattle rustling. Inside the town, the Earp brothers—Wyatt, Jim, Morgan, Virgil, and Warren—and their friends William

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**MAP 17.2 The United States, 1876–1912**

A wave of admissions between 1889 and 1912 brought remaining territories to statehood and marked the final creation of new states until Alaska and Hawai'i were admitted in the 1950s.

(“Bat”) Masterson and John Henry (“Doc”) Holliday operated on both sides of the law as gunmen, gamblers, and politicians. A feud between the Clantons and Earps climaxed on October 26, 1881, in a shootout at the OK Corral, where three Clantons were killed and Holliday and Morgan Earp were wounded. These characters and their exploits provided material for future novels, movies, and television programs.

Writers Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and others captured the flavor of western life, and characters such as Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, and Wild Bill Hickok became western folk heroes. But violence and eccentricity were not widely common. Most miners and lumbermen worked long hours, often for corporations rather than as rugged individuals, and had little time, energy, or money for gambling, carousing, or gunfights. Women worked as long or longer as teachers, laundresses, storekeepers, and housewives. Only a few were sharpshooters or dance-hall queens. For most, western life was a matter of adapting and surviving.

## IRRIGATION AND TRANSPORTATION

Glittering gold, tall trees, and gushing oil shaped popular images of the West, but water gave it life. If western lands promised wealth from mining, cutting, and drilling, their agricultural potential promised more—but only if settlers could find a way to

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Nebraska State Historical Society

*This Nebraska scene reveals the unrelenting treeless landscape that farmer families confronted. Using windmills to raise water for their cattle and horses, farmers faced difficulties in obtaining enough water to irrigate their crops unless a river was nearby.*

bring water to the arid soil. Western economic development is the story of how public and private interests used technology and organization to utilize the region's sometimes scarce water resources to make it agriculturally productive. Just as control of land was central to western development, so, too, was control of water.

For centuries, Indians irrigated southwestern fields to sustain their subsistence farming. When the Spanish arrived, they began tapping the Rio Grande River to irrigate farms in southwest Texas and New Mexico. Later, they channeled water to California mission communities of San Diego and Los Angeles. The first Americans of northern European ancestry to practice extensive irrigation were the Mormons. After arriving in Utah in 1847, they diverted streams and rivers into networks of canals, whose water enabled them to farm the hard-baked soil. By 1890, Utah boasted over 263,000 irrigated acres supporting more than 200,000 people.

**Rights to Water** Efforts at land reclamation through irrigation in Colorado and California sparked conflict over rights to the precious streams that flowed through the West. Americans inherited the English common-law principle of riparian rights, which held that only those who owned land along a river's banks could appropriate from the water's flow. The stream itself, according to riparianism, belonged to God; those who lived near it could take water for normal needs but were not to diminish the river. This principle, intended to protect nature, discouraged economic development because it prohibited each property owner from damming or diverting water at the expense of others who lived downstream.

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## LINKS TO THE WORLD

*The Australian Frontier*

America's frontier West was not unique. Australia, founded like the United States as a European colony, had a frontier society that resembled the American West in several ways, especially in its mining development, its folk society, and its treatment of indigenous people. Australia experienced a gold rush in 1851, just two years after the United States, and large-scale mining companies quickly moved into its western regions to extract lucrative mineral deposits. In 1897, future U.S. president Herbert Hoover, who at that time was a twenty-two-year-old geology graduate, went to work in Australia and began his successful career as a mining engineer.

Promise of mineral wealth lured thousands of immigrants to Australia in the late nineteenth century. Many of the newcomers arrived from China, and, as in the United States, these immigrants, most of them men, encountered abusive treatment. Anti-Chinese riots erupted in ports in New South Wales in 1861 and 1873, and beginning in 1854, the Australian government passed several laws restricting Chinese immigration. When the country became an independent British federation in 1901, one of its first acts applied a strict literacy test that virtually terminated Chinese immigration for over fifty years.

As in the American West, the Australian frontier bred folk heroes who came to

Americans who settled the West rejected riparianism in favor of prior appropriation, which awarded a river's water to the first person who claimed it. Westerners, taking cues in part from eastern Americans who had diverted waterways to power mills and factories, asserted that water, like timber, minerals, and other natural resources, existed to serve human needs and advance profits. They argued that anyone intending a "reasonable" or "beneficial" (economically productive) use of river water should have the right to appropriation, and the courts generally agreed.

**Government Supervision of Water Rights**

Under appropriation, those who dammed and diverted water often reduced the flow of water downstream. People disadvantaged by such action could protect their interests either by suing those who deprived them of water or by establishing a public authority to regulate water usage. Thus in 1879, Colorado created several water divisions, each with a commissioner to regulate water rights. In 1890, Wyoming enlarged the concept of government control with a constitutional provision declaring that the state's rivers were public property subject to supervision.

Destined to become the most productive agricultural state, California devised a dramatic response to the problem of water rights, sometimes called the California Solution. In the 1860s, a few individuals controlled huge tracts of land in the fertile Sacramento and San Joaquin River valleys, which they used for speculating in real estate, raising cattle, and growing wheat. But around the edges of the wheat fields lay unoccupied lands that could profitably support vegetable and fruit farming if irrigated properly.

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symbolize white masculinity. In a society where men vastly outnumbered women, Australians glorified the tough, aggressive individual who displayed self-reliance and quick judgment that made the Australian backcountry man as idealized as the American cowboy. Australian outlaws (called “bushrangers”) such as Ned Kelly, an infamous bandit who was hanged in 1880, achieved the same notoriety as Americans Jesse James and Billy the Kid.

Although Australians immortalized white men who brought a spirit of personal liberty and opportunism to a new country, they also considered indigenous peoples, whom they called “Aborigines,” as savages needing to be conquered and civilized. Christian missionaries viewed aborigines as lost in pagan darkness

and tried to convert them. In 1869, the government of Victoria Province passed an Aborigine Protection Act that, like American policy toward Indians, encouraged removal of native children from their families so they could learn European customs in schools run by whites. Aborigines adapted in their own ways. They formed cricket teams, and those with light skin sometimes hid their identity by telling census takers they were white. In the end, though, assimilation did not work, and Australians resorted to reservations as a means of “protecting” Aborigines, just as Americans isolated native peoples on reserved land. Like the Americans, white Australians could not find a place for indigenous people in a land of opportunity.

Unlike western states that had favored appropriation rights over riparian rights, California maintained a mixed legal system that upheld riparianism while allowing for some appropriation. This system disadvantaged irrigators and prompted them to seek to change state law. In 1887, the legislature passed a bill permitting farmers to organize into districts that would construct and operate irrigation projects. An irrigation district could use its authority to purchase water rights, seize private property to build irrigation canals, and finance projects through taxation or by issuing bonds. As a result of this legislation, California became the nation’s leader in irrigated acreage, with more than 1 million irrigated acres by 1890, making the state’s fruit and vegetable agriculture the most profitable in the country.

### **Newlands**

#### **Reclamation Act**

Although state-supervised irrigation stimulated farming, the federal government still owned most western land in the 1890s, ranging from 64 percent of California to 96 percent of Nevada. Prodded by land-hungry developers, states wanted the federal government to transfer to them at least part of public domain lands. States claimed they could make these lands profitable through reclamation—providing them with irrigated water. Congress generally refused such transfers because of the controversies they raised. If one state sponsored irrigation to develop its own land, who would regulate waterways that flowed through more than one state? If, for example, California assumed control of the Truckee River, which flowed westward out of Lake Tahoe on the California-Nevada border, how would Nevadans be assured

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that California would give them sufficient water? Only the federal government, it seemed, had the power to regulate regional water development.

In 1902, after years of debates, Congress passed the Newlands Reclamation Act. Named for Nevada congressman Francis Newlands, the law allowed the federal government to sell western public lands to individuals in parcels not to exceed 160 acres and to use proceeds from such sales to finance irrigation projects. The Newlands Act provided for control but not conservation of water because three-fourths of the water used in open-ditch irrigation, the most common form, was lost to evaporation. Thus, the Newlands Reclamation Act fell squarely within the tradition of development of nature for human profit. It represented a decision by the federal government to aid the agricultural and general economic development of the West, just as state and federal subsidies to railroads during the 1850s and 1860s aided western settlement.

### **Railroad Construction**

Between 1865 and 1890, railroad expansion boomed, as total track grew from 35,000 to 200,000 miles, mostly from construction west of the Mississippi River (see Map 17.1).

By 1900, the United States contained one-third of all railroad track in the world. A diverse mix of workers made up construction crews. The Central Pacific, built eastward from San Francisco, employed thousands of Chinese; the Union Pacific, extending westward from Omaha, Nebraska, used mainly Irish construction gangs. Workers lived in shacks and tents that were dismantled, loaded on flatcars, and relocated each day.

Railroad construction had powerful economic effects. After 1880, when steel rails began to replace iron rails, railroads helped to boost the nation's steel industry to international leadership. Railroad expansion also spawned related industries, including coal production, passenger- and freight-car manufacture, and depot construction. Influential and essential, railroads also gave important impetus to western urbanization. With their ability to transport large loads of people and freight, lines such as the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific accelerated the growth of western hubs such as Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City, Cheyenne, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle.

### **Railroad Subsidies**

Railroads accomplished these feats with help from some of the largest government subsidies in American history. Promoters argued that because railroads were a public benefit,

the government should aid them by giving them land from the public domain, which they could then sell to finance construction. During the Civil War, Congress, dominated by business-minded Republicans and in the absence of representatives from the seceded southern states, was sympathetic, as it had been when it aided steamboat companies earlier in the century. As a result, the federal government granted railroad corporations over 180 million acres, mostly for interstate routes. These grants usually consisted of a right of way, plus alternate sections of land in a strip 20 to 80 miles wide along the right of way. Railroads funded construction by using the land as security for bonds or by selling it for cash. States and localities heaped on further subsidies. State legislators, many of whom had financial interests

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in a railroad's success, granted some 50 million acres. Cities and towns also assisted, usually by offering loans or by purchasing railroad bonds or stocks.

Government subsidies had mixed effects. Although capitalists often opposed government involvement in the economic affairs of private companies, railroads nevertheless accepted public aid and pressured governments into meeting their needs. The Southern Pacific, for example, threatened to bypass Los Angeles unless the city paid a bonus and built a depot. Localities that could not or would not pay suffered. Without public help, few railroads could have prospered sufficiently to attract private investment, yet such aid was not always salutary. During the 1880s, the policy of generosity haunted communities whose zeal had prompted them to commit too much to railroads that were never built or that defaulted on loans. Some laborers and farmers fought subsidies, arguing that companies such as the Southern Pacific would become too powerful. Many communities boomed, however, because they had linked their fortunes to the iron horse. Moreover, railroads helped attract investment into the West and drew farmers into the market economy.

**Standard Gauge, Standard Time** Railroad construction brought about important technological and organizational reforms. By the late 1880s, almost all lines had adopted standard-gauge rails so that their tracks could connect with one another. Air brakes, automatic car couplers, and other devices made rail transportation safer and more efficient. The need for gradings, tunnels, and bridges spurred the growth of the American engineering profession. Organizational advances included systems for coordinating passenger and freight schedules, and the adoption of uniform freight-classification systems. Railroads also, however, helped reinforce racial segregation by separating black from white passengers on railroad cars and in stations.

Rail transportation altered conceptions of time and space. First, by surmounting physical barriers by bridging rivers and tunneling through mountains, railroads transformed space into time. Instead of expressing the distance between places in miles, people began to refer to the amount of time it took to travel from one place to another. Second, railroad scheduling required nationwide standardization of time. Before railroads, local clocks struck noon when the sun was directly overhead, and people set clocks and watches accordingly. But because the sun was not overhead at exactly the same moment everywhere, time varied from place to place. Boston's clocks, for instance, differed from those in New York by almost twelve minutes. To impose regularity, railroads created their own time zones. In 1883, without authority from Congress, the nation's railroads agreed to establish four standard time zones for the country. Most communities adjusted accordingly, and railroad time became national time.

## FARMING THE PLAINS

While California emerged as the nation's highest-yielding agricultural state, extraordinary development occurred in the Great Plains. There, farming in the late 1800s exemplified two important achievements: the transformation of arid,

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windswept prairies into arable land that would yield crops to benefit humankind, and the transformation of agriculture into big business by means of mechanization, long-distance transportation, and scientific cultivation. These feats did not come easily. The region's climate and terrain presented formidable challenges, and overcoming them did not guarantee success. Irrigation and mechanized agriculture enabled farmers to feed the nation's burgeoning population and turned the United States into the world's breadbasket, but the experience also scarred the lives of countless men and women who made that accomplishment possible.

### Settlement of the Plains

During the 1870s and 1880s, more acres were put under cultivation in states such as Kansas, Nebraska, and Texas than in the entire country during the previous 250 years.

The number of farms tripled between 1860 and 1910, as hundreds of thousands of hopeful farmers streamed into the Plains region. The Homestead Act of 1862 and other measures to encourage western settlement offered cheap or free plots to people who would reside on and improve their property. Railroads that had received land subsidies were especially aggressive, advertising cheap land, arranging credit terms, offering reduced fares, and promising instant success. Railroad agents—often former immigrants—traveled to Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and other European nations to recruit settlers and greeted newcomers at eastern ports.

Most families who settled western farmlands migrated because opportunities there seemed to promise a second chance, a better existence than their previous one. Railroad expansion gave farmers in remote regions a way to ship produce to market, and construction of grain elevators eased problems of storage. As a result of worldwide as well as national population growth, demand for farm products burgeoned, and the prospects for commercial agriculture—growing crops for profit and for shipment to distant, including international, markets—became more favorable than ever.

### Hardship on the Plains

Life on the farm, however, was much harder than advertisements and railroad agents insinuated. Migrants often encountered scarcities of essentials they had once taken for granted, and they had to adapt to the environment. Barren prairies contained insufficient lumber for housing and fuel, so pioneer families had to build houses of sod and burn buffalo dung for heat. Water for cooking and cleaning was sometimes scarce also. Machinery for drilling wells was expensive, as were windmills for drawing water to the surface.

Weather was even more formidable than the terrain. The climate between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains divides along a line running from Minnesota southwest through Oklahoma, then south, bisecting Texas. West of this line, annual rainfall averages less than twenty-eight inches, not enough for most crops or trees (see Map 17.3), and even that scant life-giving rain was never certain. Heartened by adequate water one year, farmers gagged on dust and broke plows on hardened limestone soil the next.

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**MAP 17.3 Agricultural Regions of the United States, 1890**

In the Pacific Northwest and east of the twenty-eight-inch-rainfall line, farmers could grow a greater variety of crops. Territory west of the line was either too mountainous or too arid to support agriculture without irrigation. The grasslands that once fed buffalo herds could now feed beef cattle.

Weather seldom followed predictable cycles. Weeks of torrid summer heat and parching winds suddenly gave way to violent storms that washed away crops and property. Frigid winter blizzards piled up mountainous snowdrifts that halted outdoor movement. During the Great Blizzard that struck Nebraska, Wyoming, and Dakota Territory in the winter of 1886–1887, the temperature plunged to 36 degrees below zero. In springtime, melting snow swelled streams and floods threatened millions of acres. In fall, a week without rain turned dry grasslands into tinder, and the slightest spark could ignite a raging prairie fire. Severe drought in Texas between 1884 and 1886 drove many farmers off the land, and a more widespread drought in 1886 struck areas as diverse as Dakota, Wyoming, and California.

Nature could be cruel even under good conditions. Weather favorable for crops was also good for breeding insects. Worms and flying pests ravaged fields. In the 1870s and 1880s, grasshopper swarms virtually ate up entire farms. Heralded only by the din of buzzing wings, a mile-long cloud of insects would smother the land and devour everything: plants, tree bark, and clothing. As one farmer lamented, the “hoppers left behind nothing but the mortgage.”

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**Social Isolation** Settlers also had to cope with social isolation. In New England and Europe, farmers lived in villages and traveled daily to nearby fields. This pattern of community building was rare in the vast expanses of the Plains—and in the Far West and South as well—where peculiarities of land division compelled rural dwellers to live apart from each other. Because most plots were rectangular—usually encompassing 160 acres—at most four families could live near one another, but only if they built homes around their shared four-corner intersection. In practice, farm families usually lived back from their boundary lines, and at least a half-mile separated farmhouses. Men might find escape by working in distant fields and taking occasional trips to town to sell crops or buy supplies. Women were more isolated, confined by domestic chores to the household. They visited and exchanged food and services with neighbor women when they could, but, as one writer observed, a farm woman’s life was “a weary, monotonous round of cooking and washing and mending.”

Letters that Ed Donnell, a young Nebraska homesteader, wrote to his family in Missouri reveal how time and circumstances could dull optimism. In the fall of 1885, Donnell rejoiced to his mother, “I like Nebr first rate.... I have saw a pretty tuff time a part of the time since I have been out here, but I started out to get a home and I was determined to win or die in the attempt.... Have got a good crop of corn, a floor in my house and got it ceiled overhead.” Already, though, Donnell was lonely. He went on, “There is lots of other bachelors here but I am the only one I know who doesn’t have kinfolks living handy.... You wanted to know when I was going to get married. Just as quick as I can get money ahead to get a cow.”

A year and a half later, Donnell’s dreams were dissolving and, still a bachelor, he was beginning to look for a second chance elsewhere. He wrote to his brother, “The rats eat my sod stable down.... I may sell out this summer, land is going up so fast.... If I sell I am going west and grow up with the country.” By fall, conditions had worsened. Donnell lamented, “We have been having wet weather for 3 weeks.... My health has been so poor this summer and the wind and the sun hurts my head so. I think if I can sell I will... move to town for I can get \$40 a month working in a grist mill and I would not be exposed to the weather.” Donnell’s doubts and hardships, shared by thousands of other people, fed the cityward migration of farm folk that fueled late-nineteenth-century urban growth (see Chapter 19).

**Mail-Order Companies and Rural Free Delivery**

Farm families survived by sheer resolve and by organizing churches and clubs where they could socialize a few times a month. By 1900, two developments had brought rural settlers who lived east of the rainfall line into closer contact with modern consumer society. First, mail-order companies, such as Montgomery Ward (founded in 1872) and Sears, Roebuck (founded in 1893), made new products attainable. Emphasizing personal attention to customers, Ward and Sears received letters that often reported family news and sought advice on needs from gifts to childcare. A Washington man wrote to Mr. Ward, “As you advertise everything for sale that a person wants, I thought I would write you, as I am in need of a wife, and see what you could do for me.” Another reported, “I suppose you wonder why we haven’t ordered anything from you since

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the fall. The cow kicked my arm and broke it and besides my wife was sick, and there was the doctor bill. But now, thank God, that is paid, and we are all well again, and we have a fine new baby boy, and please send plush bonnet number 29d8077.”

Second, after farmers petitioned Congress for extension of the postal service, in 1896 the government made Rural Free Delivery (RFD) widely available. Farmers previously had to go to town to pick up mail. Now they could receive letters, newspapers, and catalogues in a roadside mailbox nearly every day. In 1913, the postal service inaugurated parcel post, which enabled people to receive packages, such as orders from Ward and Sears, more cheaply.

### **Mechanization of Agriculture**

As with industrial production (see Chapter 18), the late-nineteenth-century agricultural revolution was driven by the expanded use of machinery. When the Civil War drew men away from farms in the upper Mississippi River valley, women and older men who remained behind began using reapers and other mechanical implements to grow crops to satisfy demand for food and take advantage of high grain prices. After the war, demand encouraged farmers to continue utilizing machines, and inventors developed new implements to facilitate planting and harvesting. Seeders, combines, binders, mowers, and rotary plows, carried westward by railroads, improved grain growing on the Plains and in California. Technology also aided dairy and poultry farming. The centrifugal cream separator, patented in 1879, sped the process of skimming cream from milk, and a mechanized incubator, invented in 1885, made chicken raising more profitable.

For centuries, the acreage of grain a farmer planted was limited by the amount that could be harvested by hand. Machines—driven first by animals, then by steam—significantly increased productivity. Before mechanization, a farmer working alone could harvest about 7.5 acres of wheat. Using an automatic binder that cut and bundled the grain, the same farmer could harvest 135 acres. Machines dramatically reduced the time and cost of farming other crops as well.

### **Legislative and Scientific Aids**

Meanwhile, Congress and scientists worked to improve existing crops and develop new ones. The 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act gave each state federal lands to sell in order to finance agricultural research at educational institutions. The act prompted establishment of public universities in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, California, and other states. A second Morrill Act in 1890 aided more schools, including several all-black colleges. The Hatch Act of 1887 provided for agricultural experiment stations in every state, further encouraging the advancement of farming science and technology.

Science also enabled farmers to use the soil more efficiently. Researchers developed dry farming, a technique of plowing and harrowing that minimized evaporation of precious moisture. Botanists perfected varieties of “hard” wheat whose seeds could withstand northern winters, and millers invented a process for grinding the tougher wheat kernels into flour. Agriculturists adapted new varieties of alfalfa from Mongolia, corn from North Africa, and rice from Asia. Horticulturist Luther

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TABLE 17.1 | SUMMARY: GOVERNMENT LAND POLICY

Railroad land grants (1850–1871)	Granted 181 million acres to railroads to encourage construction and development
Homestead Act (1862)	Gave 80 million acres to settlers to encourage settlement
Morrill Act (1862)	Granted 11 million acres to states to sell to fund public agricultural colleges
Other grants	Granted 129 million acres to states to sell for other educational and related purposes
Dawes Act (1887)	Allotted some reservation lands to individual Indians to promote private property and weaken tribal values among Indians and offered remaining reservation lands for sale to whites (by 1906, some 75 million acres had been acquired by whites)
Various laws	Permitted direct sales of 100 million acres by the Land Office

Source: Goldfield, David; Abbott, Carl E.; Anderson, Virginia DeJohn; Argersinger, Jo Ann E.; Argersinger, Peter H.; Barney, William.; Weir, Robert M., *American Journey, The*, Volume II, 3rd ed., © 2004. Printed and electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Burbank developed hundreds of new food plants and flowers at a garden laboratory in Sebastopol, California. George Washington Carver, a son of slaves who became a chemist and taught at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, created hundreds of products from peanuts, soybeans, and sweet potatoes. Other scientists devised means of combating plant and animal diseases. Just as in mining and manufacturing, science and technology provided American farming with means for expanding productivity in the market economy (see Table 17.1).

## THE RANCHING FRONTIER

While commercial farming overspread the West, it ran headlong into one of the region's most romantic industries—ranching. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Spanish landholders had engaged in cattle raising in Mexico and what would become the American Southwest. They employed Indian and Mexican cowboys, known as *vaqueros*, who tended the herds and rounded up cattle to be branded and slaughtered. Anglo ranchers moving into Texas and California in the early nineteenth century hired *vaqueros*, who in turn taught their skills in roping, branding, horse training, and saddle making to white and African American cowboys.

By the 1860s, cattle raising became increasingly profitable, as population growth boosted the demand for beef and railroads simplified the transportation of food. By 1870, drovers were herding thousands of Texas cattle northward to Kansas, Missouri, and Wyoming (see Map 17.1). At the northern terminus, the cattle were sold to northern ranches or loaded onto trains bound for Chicago and St. Louis, for slaughter and distribution to national and international markets.

The long drive gave rise to romantic lore of bellowing cattle, buckskin-clad cowboys, and smoky campfires under starry skies, but the process was not very

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Nebraska State Historical Society

*A group of cowboys prepare for a roundup. Note the presence of African Americans, who, along with Mexicans, made up one-fourth of all cowboys. Though they rarely became trail bosses or ranch owners, black cowboys enjoyed an independence on the trails unavailable to them on tenant farms and city streets.*

efficient. Trekking 1,000 miles or more for two to three months made cattle sinewy and tough. Herds traveling through Indian territory and farmers' fields were sometimes shot at and later prohibited from such trespass by state laws. Ranchers adjusted by raising herds nearer to railroad routes. When ranchers discovered that crossing Texas longhorns with heavier Hereford and Angus breeds produced animals better able to survive harsh winters, cattle raising expanded northward, and proliferating herds in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota crowded out already declining buffalo populations. Profits were considerable. A rancher could purchase a calf for \$5, let it feed on grasslands for a few years, recapture it in a roundup, and sell it at a market price of \$40 or \$45.

### The Open Range

Cattle raisers needed vast pastures to graze their herds while incurring as little expense as possible. Thus, they often bought a few acres bordering a stream and turned their herds loose on adjacent public domain that no one wanted because it lacked water access. By this method, called open-range ranching, a cattle raiser could utilize thousands of acres by owning only a hundred or so. Neighboring ranchers often formed associations and allowed herds to graze together. Owners identified their cattle by burning a brand into each animal's hide. Each ranch had its own brand—a shorthand method for labeling movable property. But as more profit-seeking ranchers flowed into the Plains, cattle began to overrun the range, and other groups challenged ranchers over use of the land.

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In California and New Mexico, sheepherders were also using the public domain, sparking territorial clashes. Ranchers complained that sheep ruined grassland by eating down to the roots and that cattle refused to graze where sheep had been. Occasionally ranchers and sheepherders resorted to armed conflict rather than settle disagreements in court, where a judge might discover that both were using public land illegally.

More important, however, the advancing farming frontier was generating new demands for land. Devising a way to organize property resulted in an unheralded but significant change in land management. The problem was fencing. Lacking sufficient timber and stone for traditional fencing, western settlers could not easily define and protect their property. Tensions flared when farmers accused cattle raisers of allowing their herds to trespass on cropland and when herders in turn charged that farmers should fence their property against grazing animals. But ranchers and farmers alike lacked an economical means of enclosing herds and fields.

### Barbed Wire

The solution was barbed wire. Invented in 1873 by Joseph F. Glidden, a DeKalb, Illinois, farmer, this fencing consisted of wires held in place by sharp spurs. Mass-produced by the Washburn and Moen Manufacturing Company of Worcester, Massachusetts—80.5 million pounds worth in 1880 alone—barbed wire provided a cheap and durable means of enclosure. It opened the Plains to homesteaders by enabling them to protect their farms from grazing cattle. It also ended open-range ranching and made roundups unnecessary because it enabled large-scale ranchers to enclose their herds within massive stretches of private property. In addition, the development of the round silo for storing and making fodder enabled cattle raisers to feed their herds without grazing them on vast stretches of land.

### Ranching as Big Business

By 1890, big businesses were taking over the cattle industry and applying scientific methods of breeding and feeding. Corporations also used technology to squeeze larger returns out of meatpacking. Like buffalo, all parts of a cow had uses. Only about half of it consisted of salable meat. Meatpackers' largest profits came from livestock by-products: hides for leather, blood for fertilizer, hooves for glue, fat for candles and soap, and the rest for sausages. But cattle processing also had a harmful environmental impact. What meatpackers and leather tanners could not sell was dumped into rivers and streams. By the late nineteenth century, the stench from the Chicago River, which flowed past the city's mammoth processing plants, made nearby residents sick.

Open-range ranching made beef a staple of the American diet and created a few fortunes, but it could not survive the rush of history. During the 1880s, overgrazing destroyed nourishing grass supplies on the Plains, and the brutal winter of 1886–1887 destroyed 90 percent of some herds and drove small ranchers out of business. By 1890, large-scale ranchers owned or leased the land they used, though some illegal fencing persisted. Cowboys formed labor organizations and participated in strikes for higher pay. The myth of the cowboy's freedom and individualism lived on, but ranching, like mining and farming, quickly became a corporate business.

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## SUMMARY

The landscape of the American West exerted lasting influence, through its majesty and its fragility, on the complex mix of people who built communities there. Indians, the original inhabitants, had used, and sometimes abused, the land to support subsistence cultures that included trade and war as well as hunting and farming. Living mostly in small groups, they depended on delicate resources such as buffalo herds and salmon runs. When they came into contact with commerce-minded, migratory European-Americans, their resistance to the market economy, diseases, and violence that whites brought into the West failed. The result was that the story of the American West became the story of the invaders, not that of the natives.

Mexicans, Chinese, African Americans, and Anglos discovered a reciprocal relationship between human activities and the nonhuman world that they had not always anticipated. Miners, timber cutters, farmers, and builders extracted raw minerals to supply eastern factories, used irrigation and machines to bring forth agricultural abundance from the land, filled pastures with cattle and sheep to expand food sources, and constructed railroads to tie the nation together. In doing so, they transformed half of the nation's territory within a few decades. But the environment also exerted its own power over humans, through its climate, its insects and parasites, and its impenetrable hazards and barriers to human movement and agriculture.

The West's settlers, moreover, employed violence and greed that sustained discrimination within a multiracial society, left many farmers feeling cheated and betrayed, provoked contests over use of water and pastures, and sacrificed environmental balance for market profits. The region's raw materials and agricultural products raised living standards and hastened industrial progress, but not without human and environmental costs.

# 18

## THE MACHINE AGE 1877–1920

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Technology and the Triumph of Industrialization • *LINKS TO THE WORLD* *The Atlantic Cable*
- Mechanization and the Changing Status of Labor
- Labor Violence and the Union Movement • Standards of Living • The Corporate Consolidation Movement • The Gospel of Wealth and Its Critics • Summary

### TECHNOLOGY AND THE TRIUMPH OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

While some people pursued opportunity in the American frontier, others sought new ways of doing things with technology. Thomas Edison was one such person. In 1876, he and his associates opened an “invention factory” in Menlo Park, New Jersey, where they intended to turn out “a minor invention every ten days and a big thing every six months or so.” Edison’s attitude reflected the spirit that enlivened American inventiveness, which in turn drove industrialization in the late nineteenth century. Activity at the U.S. Patent Office, created by the Constitution to “promote the Progress of science and useful Arts,” reflected this spirit. Between 1790 and 1860, the government granted a total of 36,000 patents. In the next seventy-year span, 1860 to 1930, it registered 1.5 million. Inventions often sprang from a marriage between technology and business organization. The harnessing of electricity, internal combustion, and industrial chemistry illustrates how this marriage worked.

#### Birth of the Electrical Industry

Most of Edison’s one thousand inventions used electricity to transmit light, sound, and images. His biggest “big thing” project began in 1878 when he embarked on a search for an efficient means of indoor lighting. After tedious experiments,

Edison perfected an incandescent bulb that used tungsten to prevent the filament from burning up when electrical current passed through it. At the same time, his Edison Electric Light Company devised a system of power generation and distribution that could provide electricity conveniently to thousands of customers. To market his ideas, Edison acted as his own publicist. During the 1880 Christmas season, he illuminated Menlo Park; and in 1882, he built a power plant that lighted

## CHRONOLOGY

<b>1869</b>	Knights of Labor founded
<b>1873–78</b>	Economy declines
<b>1877</b>	Widespread railroad strikes protest wage cuts
<b>1878</b>	Edison Electric Light Company founded
<b>1879</b>	George’s <i>Poverty and Progress</i> argues for taxing unearned wealth
<b>1881</b>	First federal trademark law begins spread of brand names
<b>1882</b>	Standard Oil Trust founded
<b>1884–85</b>	Economy declines
<b>1886</b>	Haymarket riot in Chicago protests police brutality against labor demonstrations American Federation of Labor (AFL) founded
<b>1890</b>	Sherman Anti-Trust Act outlaws “combinations in restraint of trade”
<b>1892</b>	Homestead (Pennsylvania) steelworkers strike against Carnegie Steel Company
<b>1893–97</b>	Economic depression causes high unemployment and business failures
<b>1894</b>	Workers of Pullman Palace Car Company strike
<b>1895</b>	<i>U.S. v. E. C. Knight Co.</i> limits Congress’s power to regulate manufacturing
<b>1896</b>	<i>Holden v. Harcy</i> upholds law regulating miners’ working hours
<b>1903</b>	Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) founded
<b>1905</b>	<i>Lochner v. New York</i> overturns law limiting bakery workers’ working hours Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) founded
<b>1908</b>	<i>Muller v. Oregon</i> upholds law limiting women to ten-hour workday First Ford Model T built
<b>1911</b>	Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City leaves 146 workers dead
<b>1913</b>	Ford begins moving assembly-line production
<b>1919</b>	Telephone operators strike in New England

eighty-five buildings on New York’s Wall Street. A *New York Times* reporter marveled that working in his office at night now “seemed almost like writing in daylight.”

The application of electricity to production and everyday life illustrates the dynamic and flexible quality of American inventiveness and organizational skill in

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the industrial era. For example, though Edison had applied his genius to inventions that utilized electricity, his system of direct current could transmit electricity only a mile or two because it lost voltage the farther it was transmitted. George Westinghouse, an inventor from Schenectady, New York, who had previously created an air brake for railroad cars, solved the problem. Westinghouse purchased European patent rights to generators that used alternating current and to transformers that reduced high-voltage power to lower voltage levels, thus making long-distance transmission more efficient.

Other entrepreneurs created new practices to market Edison's and Westinghouse's technological breakthroughs. Samuel Insull, formerly Edison's private secretary, organized Edison power plants across the country, amassing an electric utility empire. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, financiers Henry Villard and J. P. Morgan bought up patents in electric lighting and merged small equipment-manufacturing companies into the General Electric Company. Equally important, General Electric and Westinghouse Electric encouraged practical applications of electricity by establishing research laboratories that paid scientists to create electrical products for everyday use.

While corporations organized company labs, independent inventors tried, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, to sell their handiwork and patents to large manufacturers. One such inventor, Granville T. Woods, an engineer sometimes called "the black Edison," patented thirty-five devices vital to electronics and communications. Among his inventions, most of which he sold to companies such as General Electric, were an automatic circuit breaker, an electromagnetic brake, and instruments to aid communications between railroad trains.

### Henry Ford and the Automobile Industry

In 1885, German engineer Gottlieb Daimler built a lightweight, internal-combustion motor driven by vaporized gasoline—an invention that inspired one of America's most visionary manufacturers, Henry Ford. In the 1890s, Ford, an electrical engineer in Detroit's Edison Company, experimented in his spare time using Daimler's engine to power a vehicle. George Selden, a Rochester, New York, lawyer, had already been tinkering with such technology, but Ford applied organizational genius to this invention and spawned a massive industry.

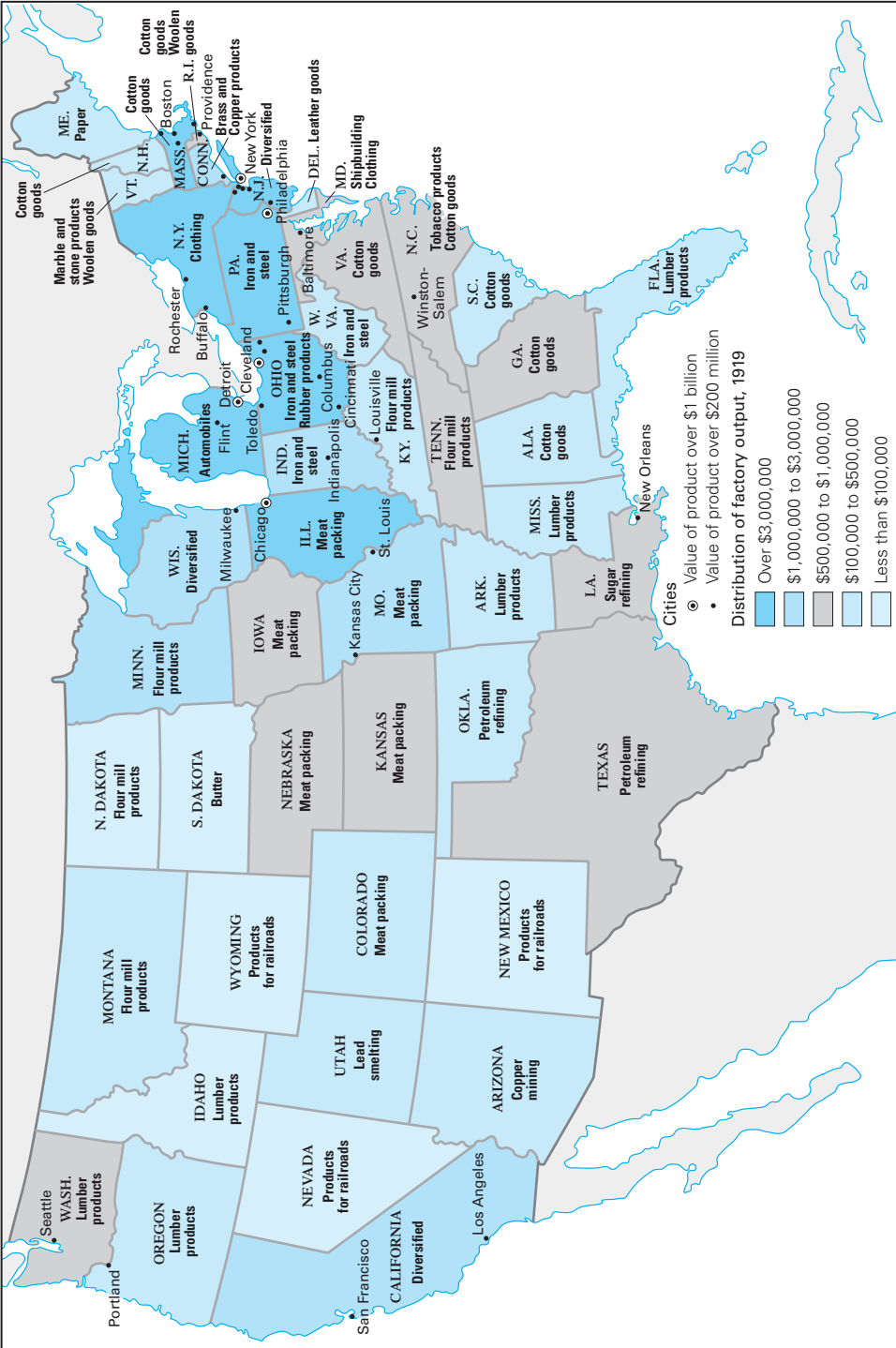
Like Edison, Ford had a scheme as well as a product. In 1909, he declared, "I am going to democratize the automobile. When I'm through, everybody will be able to afford one, and about everyone will have one." Ford proposed to reach this goal by mass-producing thousands of identical cars in exactly the same way. Adapting methods of the meatpacking and metalworking industries, Ford engineers set up assembly lines that drastically reduced the time and cost of producing autos. Instead of performing numerous tasks, each worker performed only one task, performed repeatedly, using the same specialized machine. In this way, workers assembled the entire car as it passed by them on a conveyor belt.

In 1913, the Ford Motor Company's first full assembly line began operation in Highland Park outside Detroit, and the next year, Ford sold 248,000 cars. Soon, other manufacturers entered the field. Rising output created more jobs,

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Data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Vol. IX, Manufacturing (U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, D.C., 1921).



**MAP 18.1 Industrial Production, 1919**

By the early twentieth century, each state could boast at least one kind of industrial production. Although the value of goods produced was still highest in the Northeast, states such as Minnesota and California had impressive dollar values of outputs.

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## LINKS TO THE WORLD

*The Atlantic Cable*

During the late nineteenth century, as American manufacturers expanded their markets overseas, their ability to communicate with customers and investors improved immeasurably because of a telegraph cable laid beneath the Atlantic Ocean. Cyrus Field, the man who thought up the idea to build an undersea cable, was an American. Yet most of the engineers who worked on the Atlantic cable, as well as most of the capitalists involved in the venture, were British. In 1851, a British company laid the first successful undersea telegraph cable from Dover, England, to Calais, France, proving that an insulated wire could carry signals underwater. The benefits of this venture, which connected Reuters news service to the European continent and allowed French investors to receive instantaneous messages from the London Stock Exchange, inspired British and American businessmen to attempt a larger project across the Atlantic.

The first attempts to build a transatlantic cable failed, but in 1866 a British ship, funded by British investors, successfully laid a telegraph wire that operated without interruption. The project was designed by cooperative efforts of American and British electrical engineers. Thereafter, England and the United States grew more closely linked in their diplomatic relations, and citizens of both nations developed greater concern for each other

as a result of their ability to receive international news more quickly. When American president James Garfield was assassinated in 1881, the news traveled almost instantly to Great Britain, and Britons mourned the death more profusely than they had mourned the passing of Abraham Lincoln, whose death was unknown in England until eleven days after it had occurred because transatlantic messages at that time traveled by steamship.

Some people lamented the stresses that near-instant international communications now created. One observer remarked that the telegraph tended “to make every person in a hurry, and I do not believe that with our business it is very desirable that it should be so.” But others welcomed the benefits from the cable’s link. Rapid availability of stock quotes boomed activity at the New York and London stock exchanges, much to investors’ delight. Newspaper readers enjoyed reading about events on the other side of the ocean the next day, instead of a week after they had occurred. And the success of the Atlantic cable inspired similar ventures in the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean and, eventually across the Pacific. By 1902, underwater cables circled the globe, and the age of global telecommunications had begun.

higher earnings, and greater profits not only for car manufacturers, but also in related industries such as steel, oil, paint, rubber, and glass. Moreover, assembly-line production in these and other industries required new companies to fabricate precision machine tools to create standardized parts. Advances in grinding and cutting technology in this era made production processes accurate to one-thousandth of an inch.

By 1914, a Ford car cost \$490, about one-fourth of its price a decade earlier. Yet even \$490 was too expensive for many workers, who earned at best \$2 a day.

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That year, however, Ford tried to spur productivity, prevent high labor turnover, head off unionization, and better enable his workers to buy the cars they produced by offering them the Five-Dollar-Day plan—a combination of wages and profit sharing.

### **Carnegie and Steel**

Many new products, including machines themselves, required strong, hard metal. Steel served the purpose. Though in use for many centuries, steel production was inefficient until a British engineer, Henry Bessemer, developed a process that enabled mass production of inexpensive, high-quality steel from molten iron. In America, industrialist Andrew Carnegie was one of the first to realize the benefits of the Bessemer process. After observing the process during a visit to England in 1872, Carnegie raised money to build a steel plant near Pittsburgh, which he named the Edgar Thompson Steel works after his former boss at the Pennsylvania Railroad. Using funds raised from several investors, Carnegie purchased other steel mills, notably the Homestead Steel Company in 1888, and began selling his steel, which initially had been used primarily to manufacture rails and bridge girders for railroads, to companies that utilized new technologies for plating and pressing steel to make barbed wire, tubing, and other products. In 1892, he combined his assets into the Carnegie Steel Company and by 1900 controlled about 60 percent of the country's steel business. In 1901, Carnegie retired, selling his holdings to a group organized by J. P. Morgan, who formed the huge U.S. Steel Corporation.

### **The du Ponts and the Chemical Industry**

The du Pont family's role in the chemical industry matched that of Edison, Carnegie, and Ford in their respective industries. Eleuthiere Irene du Pont, a French immigrant, began manufacturing gunpowder in Delaware in the early 1800s. In 1902, fearing antitrust prosecution for the company's near monopoly of the American explosives industry, three cousins, Alfred, Coleman, and Pierre, took over E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, and broadened production into fertilizers, dyes, and other chemical products. In 1911, du Pont scientists working in the nation's first corporate research laboratory adapted cellulose to the production of such consumer goods as photographic film, textile fibers, and plastics. The du Pont company also pioneered methods of management, accounting, and reinvestment of earnings, all of which contributed to efficient production, better record-keeping, and higher profits.

### **Technology and Southern Industry**

The South's major staple crops, tobacco and cotton, drew industry to the region after the Civil War, and other forms of production developed as well. Americans first used tobacco mainly for snuff, cigars, and chewing. But in 1876 James Bonsack, an eighteen-year-old Virginian, invented a machine for rolling cigarettes. In 1885, James B. Duke, owner of a North Carolina tobacco company, licensed Bonsack's machine and began mass-production. Like Edison and Ford, Duke marketed what he manufactured. Sales soared when he began enticing consumers

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with free samples, trading cards, and billboard ads. By 1900, his American Tobacco Company was a global business, dominating sales in England and Japan as well as the United States. Duke's and other cigarette factories employed black and white workers (including women), though in separate locations of the plant.

New technology helped relocate the textile industry to the South, as electricity made New England's water-powered mills obsolete. Factories with electric looms were more efficient because they needed fewer workers with fewer skills, and electric lighting expanded hours of production. Investors built new plants in southern communities, where a cheap labor force was available. By 1900, the South had more than four hundred textile mills. Women and children who worked in these mills earned 50 cents a day for twelve or more hours of work—about half the wages that northern millworkers received. Most mills refused to hire black workers except as janitors. Many companies built villages around their mills, where they controlled housing, stores, schools, and churches. Inside these towns, owners banned criticism of the company and squelched attempts at union organization.

Northern and European as well as the region's own investors financed other southern industries. During the 1880s, northern capitalists developed southern iron and steel manufacturing, much of it in the boom city of Birmingham, Alabama. Between 1890 and 1900, northern lumber syndicates moved into the pine forests of the Gulf states, boosting production 500 percent. Southern wood production not only advanced the construction industry but also prompted the relocation of furniture and paper production from the North to the South.

Encouraged by industrial expansion, boosters heralded the emergence of a New South. A business class of manufacturers, merchants, and financiers made southern cities nerve centers of a new economic order, challenging the power of the planter class. Industrialists believed the South should put the military defeat of the Civil War behind it—though never forget the heroism of Confederate soldiers—and emulate the North's economic growth. Henry Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* and passionate advocate of southern progress, proclaimed, "We have sowed towns and cities in the place of theories, and put business in place of politics. We have challenged your spinners in Massachusetts and your iron-makers in Pennsylvania.... We have fallen in love with work."

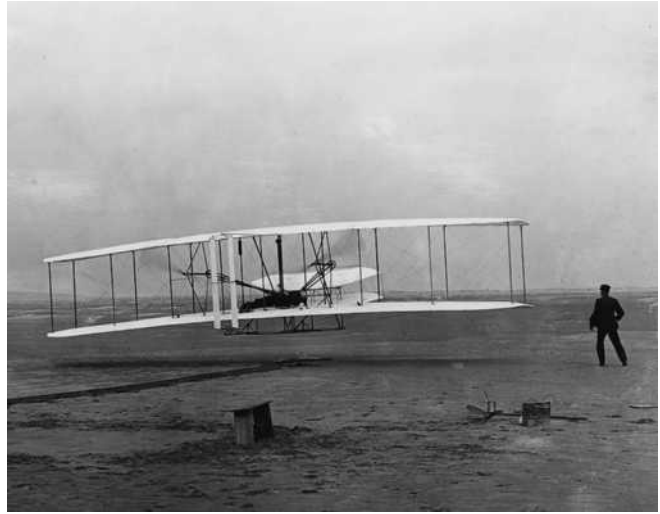
### Consequences of Technology

In all regions, the timing of technological innovation varied from one industry to another, but machines broadly altered the economy and everyday life. Telephones and typewriters made face-to-face communication less important and facilitated correspondence and recordkeeping in growing insurance and banking as well as industrial firms. Electric sewing machines made mass-produced clothing available to almost everyone. Refrigeration changed dietary habits by enabling the preservation and shipment of meat, fruit, vegetables, and dairy products. Cash registers and adding machines revamped accounting and created new clerical jobs. At the same time, American universities established programs in engineering, enabling manufacturers such as Edison and the du Ponts to hire new graduates in chemistry and physics.

In many instances, initial advances in technology originated abroad. Europeans were responsible for early discoveries in electricity and internal combustion engines.

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*Taken at the historic moment of liftoff, this photograph shows the first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903. With Orville Wright lying at the controls and brother Wilbur standing nearby, the plane was airborne only twelve seconds and traveled 120 feet. Even so, the flight marked the beginning of one of the twentieth century's most influential industries.*



Library of Congress

The Bessemer process for producing steel was developed in England, and the du Ponts imported both capital and machinery from France for their gunpowder operation. But Americans proved particularly adroit at adapting and advancing these developments. Edison's trial-and-error experiments in electric lighting, Carnegie employees' utilization of the Bessemer steelmaking process, Ford's assembly-line production of automobiles, southern textile owners' use of faster looms, construction companies' development of huge steam shovels—all these and more enabled the United States to surpass other industrializing nations in output by the turn of the century.

Profits resulted from higher production at lower costs. Skilled crafts, such as cabinet making and metalworking, persisted, but as technological innovations made large-scale production more economical, owners replaced small workshops with large factories. Between 1850 and 1900, average capital investment in a manufacturing firm increased by 250 percent. Only large companies could afford to buy complex machines and operate them at full capacity. And large companies could best take advantage of discounts for shipping products in bulk and buying raw materials in quantity. Economists call such advantages economies of scale.

Profitability depended as much on how production was arranged as on the machines in use. Where once workers controlled the methods and timing of production, by the 1890s engineers and managers with “expert” knowledge had assumed this responsibility. They planned every task to increase output. Through standardization, they reduced the need for human skills and judgment, boosting profits at the expense of worker independence.

### **Frederick W. Taylor and Efficiency**

The most influential advocate of efficient production was Frederick W. Taylor. As foreman and engineer for the Midvale Steel Company in the 1880s, Taylor concluded that the best way a company could reduce costs and increase profits

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was to apply studies of “how quickly the various kinds of work ... ought to be done.” The “ought” in Taylor’s formulation signified producing more for lower cost per unit, usually by eliminating unnecessary workers. Similarly, “how quickly” meant that time and money were equivalent. He called his scheme “scientific management.”

In 1898, Taylor took his stopwatch to the Bethlehem Steel Company to illustrate how his principles worked. His experiments, he explained, required studying workers and devising “a series of motions which can be made quickest and best.” Applying this technique to the shoveling of ore, Taylor designed fifteen kinds of shovels and prescribed proper motions for using each one, thereby reducing a crew of 600 men to 140. Soon other companies began applying Taylor’s theories to their production lines.

As a result of Taylor’s writings and experiments, time, as much as quality, became the measure of acceptable work, and management accumulated knowledge of and power over the ways of doing things. As integral elements of the assembly line, which divided work into specific time-determined tasks, employees feared they were becoming another kind of interchangeable part.

## MECHANIZATION AND THE CHANGING STATUS OF LABOR

By 1900, the status of labor had shifted dramatically in just a single generation. Technological innovation and assembly-line production created new jobs, but because most machines were labor saving, fewer workers could produce more in less time. Moreover, workers could no longer be termed producers, as farmers and craftsmen had traditionally thought of themselves. The working class now consisted mainly of employees—people who worked not on their own but when someone hired them. Producers had been paid in accordance with the quality of what they produced; employees received wages for time spent on the job.

**Mass Production** By subdividing manufacturing into small tasks, mass production required workers to repeat the same standardized operation all day every day. One investigator found that a worker became

a mere machine.... Take the proposition of a man operating a machine to nail on 40 to 60 cases of heels in a day. That is 2,400 pairs, 4,800 shoes in a day. One not accustomed to it would wonder how a man could pick up and lay down 4,800 shoes in a day, to say nothing of putting them... into a machine.... That is the driving method of the manufacture of shoes under these minute subdivisions.

Assembly lines and scientific management also deprived employees of their independence. Workers could no longer decide when to begin and end the workday, when to rest, what tools and techniques to use. The clock regulated them. As a Massachusetts factory laborer testified in 1879, “[d]uring working hours the men are not allowed to speak to each other, though working close together, on pain of instant discharge. Men are hired to watch and patrol the shop.” And employees now were surrounded by others who labored at the same rate for the same pay.

Workers affected by these changes struggled to retain autonomy and self-respect in the face of employers’ ever-increasing power. Artisans such as glass workers and

coopers (barrel makers), caught in the transition from hand labor to machine production, fought to preserve their work pace and customs—say, by appointing a fellow worker to read a newspaper aloud while they worked. When immigrants went to work in factories, they tried to persuade foremen to hire their relatives and friends, thus preserving on-the-job family and village ties. Off the job, workers gathered in saloons and parks for such leisure-time activities as social drinking and holiday celebrations, ignoring employers' attempts to control their social lives.

### **Restructuring of the Work Force**

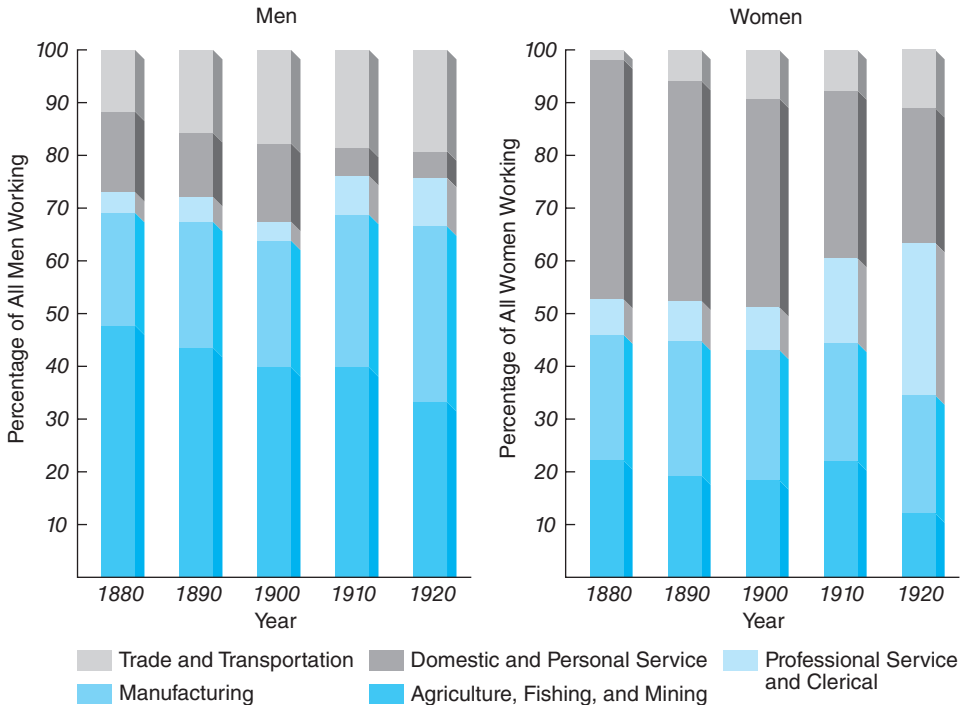
Employers, concerned with efficiency, wanted certain standards of behavior upheld. Ford Motor Company required a worker to satisfy the company's behavior code before becoming eligible for a part of the Five-Dollar-Day plan. To increase worker incentives, some employers established piecework rates, paying laborers an amount per item produced rather than an hourly wage. These efforts to increase productivity and maximize use of machines were intended to make workers perform like the machines they operated.

As machines and assembly lines reduced the need for skilled workers, employers found they could cut labor costs by hiring women and children, and paying them low wages. Between 1880 and 1900, the numbers of employed women soared from 2.6 million to 8.6 million. At the same time, their occupational patterns underwent striking changes (see Figure 18.1). The proportion of women in domestic service (maids, cooks, laundresses)—the most common and lowest-paid form of female employment—dropped as jobs opened in other sectors. In manufacturing, women usually held menial positions in textile mills and food-processing plants that paid as little as \$1.56 a week for seventy hours of labor. (Unskilled men received \$7 to \$10 for a similar workweek.) Although the number of female factory hands tripled between 1880 and 1900, the proportion of women workers in these jobs remained about the same.

Expansion of the clerical and retail sectors, however, greatly boosted the numbers and percentages of women who were typists, bookkeepers, and sales clerks. Previously, men with accounting and letter-writing skills had dominated sales and office positions. New inventions, such as the typewriter, cash register, and adding machine, simplified these tasks, and employers replaced males with lower-paid females, many of whom had taken courses in typing and shorthand in school. By 1920, women filled nearly half of all clerical jobs; in 1880, only 4 percent had been women. An official of a sugar company observed in 1919 that “all the bookkeeping of this company ... is done by three girls and three bookkeeping machines ... one operator takes the place of three men.” Although poorly paid, women were attracted to sales jobs because of the respectability, pleasant surroundings, and contact with affluent customers that such positions offered compared with factory and domestic work. Nevertheless, sex discrimination persisted. In department stores, male cashiers handled cash transactions; women seldom were given responsibility for billing or for counting money. Women held some low-level supervisory positions, but males dominated managerial ranks.

Although most children who worked toiled on their parents' farms, the number in nonagricultural occupations tripled between 1870 and 1900. In 1890, over

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**FIGURE 18.1 Distribution of Occupational Categories Among Employed Men and Women, 1880–1920**

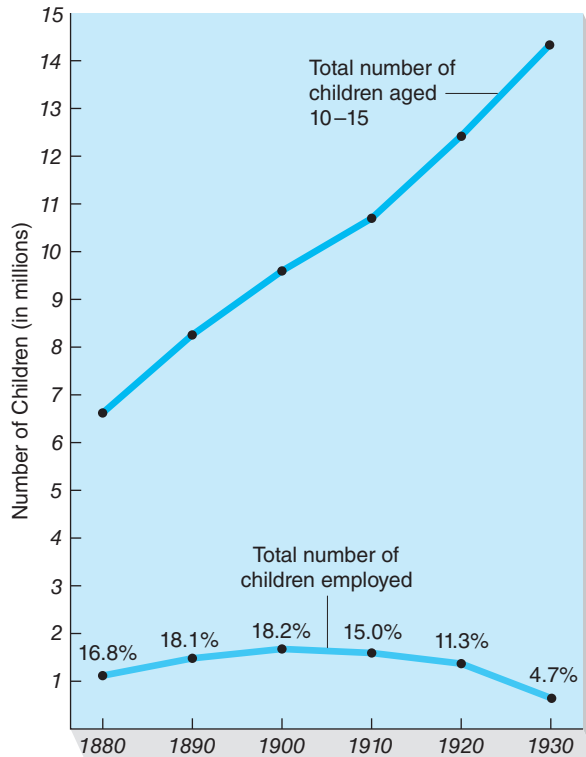
The changing lengths of the bar segments of each part of this graph represent trends in male and female employment. Over the forty years covered by this graph, the agriculture, fishing, and mining segment for men and the domestic service segment for women declined the most, whereas notable increases occurred in manufacturing for men and professional services (especially store clerks and teachers) for women.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of the United States, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office).

18 percent of all children between ages ten and fifteen were gainfully employed (see Figure 18.2). Textile and shoe factories in particular employed young workers. Mechanization created numerous light tasks, such as running errands and helping machine operators, which children could handle at a fraction of adult wages. Conditions were especially hard for child laborers in the South, where growing numbers of textile mills needed unskilled hands. Mill owners induced white sharecroppers and tenant farmers, who desperately needed extra income, to bind their children over to factories at miserably low wages.

Several states, especially in the Northeast, passed laws specifying minimum ages and maximum workday hours for child labor. But large companies could evade regulations because such statutes regulated only firms operating within state borders, not those engaged in interstate commerce. Enforcing age requirements proved difficult because many parents, needing income from child labor, lied about their children's ages, and employers rarely asked. After 1900, state laws and automation,





**FIGURE 18.2 Children in the Labor Force, 1880–1930**

The percentage of children in the labor force peaked around the turn of the century. Thereafter, the passage of state laws requiring children to attend school until age fourteen and limiting the ages at which children could be employed caused child labor to decline.

Source: Data from *The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Stamford, Conn.: Fairfield Publishers, 1965).

along with compulsory school attendance laws, began to reduce the number of children employed in manufacturing, and Progressive era reformers sought federal legislation to restrict child labor (see Chapter 21). Still, many children continued to work at street trades—shining shoes and peddling newspapers and other merchandise—and as helpers in stores. The poorest children also scavenged city streets for pieces of coal and wood, discarded clothing and furniture, and other items their families could use.

### Industrial Accidents

For all workers, industrial labor was dangerous. Repetitive tasks using high-speed machinery dulled concentration, and the slightest mistake could cause serious injury. Industrial accidents rose steadily before 1920, killing or maiming hundreds of thousands of people each year. In 1913, for example, even after factory owners had installed

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safety devices, some twenty-five thousand people died in industrial mishaps, and 1 million were injured. For those with mangled limbs, infected cuts, and chronic illnesses, there was no disability insurance to replace lost income, and families stricken by such misfortunes suffered acutely.

Sensational disasters, such as explosions and mine cave-ins, aroused outcries for better safety regulations. The most notorious tragedy was a fire at New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Company in 1911, which killed 146 workers, most of them teenage immigrant women trapped in locked workrooms. Despite public clamor, prevailing free-market views hampered passage of legislation that would regulate working conditions, and employers denied responsibility for employees' well-being. As one railroad manager declared, "The regular compensation of employees covers all risk or liability to accident. If an employee is disabled by sickness or any other cause, the right to claim compensation is not recognized."

### Freedom of Contract

To justify their treatment of workers, employers asserted the principle of "freedom of contract." The relationship between employee and employer, according to this principle, resembled one between a customer and a seller. Like the price of an item for sale, wages and working conditions were the result of a free market in which laws of supply and demand prevailed. In addition, employers asserted, workers entered into a contract with bosses, either explicit or assumed, in which they "sold" their labor. If a worker did not like the contract's provisions, such as the wages and hours, the worker was free to decline and seek another job elsewhere, just as the customer was free to buy a product somewhere else. In practice, however, employers used supply and demand to set wages as low as laborers would accept, causing workers to conclude that the system trapped them. A factory worker told Congress in 1879, "The market is glutted, and we have seasons of dullness; advantage is taken of men's wants, and the pay is cut down; our tasks are increased, and if we remonstrate, we are told our places can be filled. I work harder now than when my pay was twice as high."

### Court Rulings on Labor Reform

Reformers and union leaders lobbied Congress for laws to improve working conditions, but the Supreme Court, agreeing with business interests, limited the scope of such legislation by narrowly defining which jobs were dangerous and which workers needed protection. In *Holden v. Hardy* (1896), the Court upheld a law regulating miners' working hours, concluding that an overly long workday would increase the threat of injury. In *Lochner v. New York* (1905), however, the Court voided a law limiting bakery workers to a sixty-hour week and ten-hour day. Offsetting the argument that states had authority to protect workers' health and safety, the Court ruled that baking was not a dangerous enough occupation to justify restricting workers' right to sell their labor freely. Such restriction, according to the Court, violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee that no state could "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law."

In *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), the Court used a different rationale to uphold a law limiting women in laundries to a ten-hour workday. In this case, the Court set

aside its *Lochner* argument that a state could not interfere with an individual's right of contract, asserting instead that a woman's well-being as the bearer of children "becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race." The case represented a victory for reform groups such as the Consumers' League, which had sought government regulation of women's hours and working conditions. As a result of the *Muller* decision, however, labor laws effectively barred women from occupations, such as in printing and transportation, that required heavy lifting, long hours, or night work, further confining women to low-paying, dead-end jobs.

## LABOR VIOLENCE AND THE UNION MOVEMENT

Workers adjusted to mechanization as best they could. Some submitted to the demands of the factory, machine, and time clock. Some tried to blend old ways of working into the new system. Others resisted. Individuals challenged the system by ignoring management's orders, skipping work, or quitting. But anxiety over the loss of independence and desire for better wages, hours, and working conditions drew disgruntled workers into unions. Organized labor was not new in the late nineteenth century. Trade unions for skilled workers in crafts such as printing and iron molding dated from the early 1800s, but their influence was limited. But by the 1870s, the spread of companies with large labor forces and the tightening of management control spurred a unionization response.

### Railroad Strikes of 1877

In the economic slump that followed the Panic of 1873, railroad managers cut wages, increased workloads, and laid off workers, especially those who had joined unions. Such actions drove workers to strike and riot. The year 1877 marked a crisis. In July, unionized railroad men organized a series of strikes to oppose wage cuts. Venting pent-up anger, protesters attacked railroad property from Pennsylvania and West Virginia to the Midwest, Texas, and California, derauling trains and burning rail yards. State militias, organized and commanded by employers, broke up picket lines and fired into threatening crowds. In several communities, factory workers, wives, and merchants aided the strikers, while railroads enlisted strikebreakers to replace union men.

The worst violence occurred in Pittsburgh, where on July 21 state troops bayoneted and fired on rock-throwing demonstrators, killing ten and wounding many more. Infuriated, the mob drove the troops into a railroad roundhouse and set fires that destroyed 39 buildings, 104 engines, and 1,245 freight and passenger cars. The next day, the troops shot their way out of the roundhouse and killed twenty more citizens before fleeing the city. After more than a month of further violence, President Rutherford B. Hayes sent in federal soldiers—the first significant use of the army to quell labor unrest. Throughout the strike, emotions ran high. A Pennsylvania militiaman, ordered to break the 1877 strike, recalled, "I talked to all the strikers I could get my hands on, and I could find but one spirit and one purpose among them—that they were justified in resorting to any means to break down the power of the corporations."

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## Knights of Labor

Although they sometimes spoke for all laborers, railroad workers had struck in 1877 in their own interest. About the same time, however, an organization called the Knights of Labor tried to attract a broad base of laborers. Founded in 1869 by Philadelphia garment cutters, the Knights began recruiting other workers in the 1870s. In 1879, Terence V. Powderly, a machinist and mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania, was elected grand master. Under his guidance, Knights membership grew rapidly, peaking at 730,000 in 1886. In contrast to most craft unions, Knights welcomed unskilled and semiskilled workers, including women, immigrants, and African Americans (but not Chinese laborers).

The Knights tried to avert the bleak future they believed industrialism portended by building an alternative to profit-oriented industrial capitalism. They intended to eliminate conflict between labor and management by establishing a cooperative society in which workers, not capitalists, owned factories, mines, and railroads. The goal, argued Powderly, was to “eventually make every man his own master—every man his own employer.” The cooperative idea, attractive in the abstract, was unattainable because employers held the economic leverage and could outcompete and out-invest laborers who might try to establish their own businesses. Strikes offered one means of achieving immediate goals, but Powderly and other Knights leaders argued that strikes tended to divert attention from the long-term goal of a cooperative society and that workers tended to lose more by striking than they won.

Some Knights, however, supported militant action. In 1886, the Knights demanded higher wages and union recognition from railroads in the Southwest. Railroad magnate Jay Gould refused to negotiate, and a strike began in Texas, then spread to Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas. As violence increased, Powderly met with Gould and called off the strike, hoping for a settlement. But Gould again rejected concessions, and the Knights gave in. Militant craft unions began to desert the Knights, upset by Powderly’s compromise and confident that they could attain more on their own.

After the Haymarket riot (see below), Knights membership dwindled, although the union and its cooperative vision survived in a few small towns, where it made a brief attempt to unite with Populists in the 1890s (see Chapter 20). The special interests of craft unions replaced the Knights’ broad-based but often vague appeal, and dreams of labor unity faded.

## Haymarket Riot

The same year that Knights struck against railroads in the Southwest, workers both inside and outside unions generated mass strikes in favor of an eight-hour workday. On May 1, 1886, in Chicago, some 100,000 such workers turned out for the largest labor demonstration in the country’s history. Their numbers included anarchists who believed in using violence to replace all government with voluntary cooperation. Chicago police, fearing that European radicals were transplanting a tradition of violence to the United States, mobilized to prevent disorder, especially among striking workers at the huge McCormick reaper plant. The day passed calmly, but two days later, police stormed an area near the factory and broke up a battle between unionists and nonunion strikebreakers, killing two unionists and wounding several others.

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Labor Violence and the Union Movement

*The Haymarket riot of 1886 was one of the most violent incidents of labor unrest in the late nineteenth century. This drawing, from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, shows workers fleeing while police beat demonstrators with nightsticks. As this clash was occurring, a bomb, allegedly set off by anarchists, exploded, killing both police and workers.*

The next evening, laborers gathered at Haymarket Square near downtown Chicago to protest police brutality. As a police company approached the rally, a bomb exploded, killing seven and injuring sixty-seven. In reaction, authorities made mass arrests of anarchists and unionists. Eventually a court convicted eight anarchists of the bombing, though evidence of their guilt was questionable. Four were executed, and one committed suicide in prison. The remaining three received pardons in 1893 from Illinois governor John P. Altgeld, who believed they had been victims of the jurors' "malicious ferocity." Denounced by capitalists as a friend of anarchy, Altgeld found that his act of conscience ruined his political career.

The Haymarket bombing, like the 1877 railroad strikes, heightened fears of labor discontent and of radicalism. The presence of anarchists and socialists at Haymarket, many of them foreign-born, created a feeling that civic leaders must act swiftly to prevent social turmoil. To protect their interests, private Chicago donors helped to establish a military base near the city. Elsewhere, governments strengthened police forces and armories. Employer associations, coalitions of manufacturers in the same industry, countered labor militancy by circulating blacklists of union activists whom they would not employ and by hiring private detectives to guard company property and suppress strikes.

### American Federation of Labor

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) emerged from the upheavals of 1886 as the major workers' organization. An alliance of national craft unions, the AFL had about 140,000 members, most of them skilled workers. Led by Samuel Gompers, former head of the Cigar Makers' Union, the AFL avoided the Knights' and anarchists' idealism to press for concrete goals: higher wages, shorter hours, and the right to bargain collectively. Born in London to German Jewish parents, Gompers developed his commitment to unionism from interactions with émigré socialists, but he was more of a pragmatist than a radical. In contrast to the Knights, Gompers and the AFL accepted capitalism and worked to improve conditions within it.

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AFL member unions retained autonomy in their own areas of skill but tried to develop a policy that would suit all members. The national organization required constituent unions to hire organizers to expand membership, and it collected dues for a fund to aid members on strike. The AFL avoided party politics, adhering instead to Gompers's dictum of supporting labor's friends and opposing its enemies, regardless of party.

AFL membership grew to 1 million by 1901 and 2.5 million by 1917, when it consisted of 111 national unions and 27,000 locals. But because member unions organized by craft rather than by workplace, they had little interest in recruiting unskilled workers. Nor did they recruit women. Of 6.3 million employed women in 1910, fewer than 2 percent belonged to unions. Male unionists rationalized women's exclusion by insisting that women should not be employed. According to one labor leader, "Woman is not qualified for the conditions of wage labor.... The mental and physical makeup of woman is in revolt against wage service. She is competing with the man who is her father or husband or is to become her husband." Mostly, unionists worried that, because women were paid less, men's wages would be lowered or they would lose jobs if women invaded the workplace. Moreover, male workers, accustomed to sex segregation in employment, could not imagine working side by side with women.

Organized labor also excluded most immigrants and African Americans. Many white workers feared that such groups would depress wages, but outright nativism and racism also influenced union policies. Only a few trade unions in which foreign-born craftsmen were leaders welcomed immigrants. Blacks were prominent in the coal miners' union and were partially unionized in such trades as construction, barbering, and dock work, which employed numerous African American workers. But they could belong only to segregated local unions in the South, and the majority of northern AFL unions had exclusion policies. Long-held prejudices were reinforced when blacks and immigrants, eager for any work they could get, accepted jobs as strikebreakers to replace striking whites.

### Homestead and Pullman Strikes

The AFL and the labor movement suffered setbacks in the early 1890s, when once again labor violence stirred public fears. In July 1892, the AFL-affiliated Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steelworkers refused to accept pay cuts and went on strike in Homestead, Pennsylvania. In response, Henry C. Frick, president of Carnegie Steel Company, closed the plant. Shortly thereafter, Frick hired three hundred guards from the Pinkerton Detective Agency to protect the factory and floated them in by barge under cover of darkness. Lying in wait on the shore of the Monongahela River, angry workers attacked and routed the Pinkertons. State troops intervened, and after five months the strikers gave in. By then, public opinion had turned against the union, after a young anarchist who was not a striker attempted to assassinate Frick.

In 1894, workers at the Pullman Palace (railroad passenger) Car Company walked out in protest over exploitative policies at the company town near Chicago.

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The paternalistic owner, George Pullman, provided everything for the twelve thousand residents of the so-called model town named after him. His company controlled all land and buildings, the school, the bank, and the water and gas systems. It paid wages, fixed rents, and spied on disgruntled employees. As one laborer grumbled, “We are born in a Pullman house, fed from the Pullman shop, taught in the Pullman school, catechized in the Pullman church, and when we die we shall be buried in the Pullman cemetery and go to the Pullman hell.”

One thing Pullman would not do was negotiate with workers. When hard times hit in 1893, Pullman tried to protect profits and stock dividends by cutting wages 25 to 40 percent while holding firm on rents and prices in the town. Hard-pressed workers sent a committee to Pullman to protest his policies. He reacted by firing three committee members. Enraged workers, most of them from the American Railway Union, called a strike; Pullman retaliated by closing the factory. The union, led by the charismatic Eugene V. Debs, voted to aid strikers by refusing to handle any Pullman cars attached to any trains anywhere. Pullman rejected arbitration. The railroad owners’ association then enlisted aid from U.S. Attorney General Richard Olney, a former railroad lawyer, who obtained a court injunction to prevent the union from “obstructing the railways and holding up the mails.” President Grover Cleveland ordered federal troops to Chicago, ostensibly to protect rail-carried mail, but in reality to crush the strike. Within a month, strikers gave in, and Debs was imprisoned for defying the court injunction. The Supreme Court upheld Debs’s six-month sentence on grounds that the federal government could legally remove obstacles to interstate commerce.

### Labor Violence in the West

In the West, unionized miners, led by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), engaged in some especially violent strikes during the 1890s. In 1894, at Cripple Creek, Colorado, fighting erupted when miners struck after mine owners increased the workday from eight to ten hours without increasing pay. When negotiations broke down, owners organized a private army to protect strikebreaking workers, and miners formed their own fighting force in response. The two sides battled for over a week until state militia, called out by Governor Davis Waite, intervened. Waite obtained a settlement with mine owners agreeing to restore the eight-hour day. As a result, membership in the WFM rose but so, too, did reaction by employers against the union.

In Idaho, federal troops were called out three times to combat striking miners and protect company property during the 1890s. In 1899, after strikers blew up buildings of the Bunker Hill Mining Company in Wardner, Idaho, soldiers arrested every male in the town, and Governor Frank Steunenberg declared martial law. In 1905, Steunenberg, no longer in office, was assassinated outside his home; speculation arose that the WFM had killed him out of revenge. Investigation by Pinkerton Detective James McParland resulted in the arrest of WFM Secretary-Treasurer William “Big Bill” Haywood, a brawny, one-eyed radical, and two other WFM officials. Tried for murder in 1907, Haywood was acquitted after his attorney, the famed Clarence Darrow, subverted testimony of a key witness.

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**IWW**

In 1905, in the wake of these and other events, rebel unionists formed a new, radical labor organization, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Unlike the AFL but like the Knights of Labor, the IWW strove to unite all laborers of all races who were excluded from craft unions. Its motto was “An injury to one is an injury to all,” and its goal was “One Big Union.” But the “Wobblies,” as IWW members were known, exceeded the tactics of the Knights by espousing violence and sabotage. Embracing rhetoric of class conflict and an ideology of socialism, Wobblies believed workers should seize and run the nation’s industries. Leaders such as Haywood; Mary “Mother” Jones, an Illinois coalfield union organizer; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a fiery orator known as the “Joan of Arc of the labor movement”; Italian radical Carlo Tresca; and Swedish-born organizer and songwriter Joe Hill headed a series of strife-torn strikes. Demonstrations erupted in the steel town of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania (1907), and in textile mills at Lawrence, Massachusetts (1912), as well as in the western lumber and mining camps. Although the Wobblies’ anticapitalist goals and aggressive tactics attracted considerable publicity, the organization collapsed during the First World War when federal prosecution sent many of its leaders to jail and local police forces violently harassed IWW members.

**Women  
Unionists**

Despite their general exclusion from unions, some women employees organized and fought employers as strenuously as men did. The “Uprising of the 20,000” in New York City, a 1909 strike by male and female immigrant members of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU), was one of the country’s largest strikes to that time. Women were also prominent in the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile workers’ “Bread and Roses” strike. Female trade-union membership grew during the 1910s, but men monopolized national leadership, even in industries with large female work forces, such as garment manufacturing, textiles, and boots and shoes.

Women, however, did dominate one union: the Telephone Operators’ Department of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Organized in Boston in 1912, the union spread throughout the Bell system, the nation’s monopolistic telephone company and single largest employer of women. To promote solidarity among their mostly young female members, union leaders organized dances, excursions, and bazaars. They also sponsored educational programs to enhance members’ leadership skills. The union focused mainly on workplace issues. Intent on developing pride and independence among telephone operators, the union resisted scientific management techniques and tightening of supervision. In 1919, several militant union branches paralyzed the phone service of five New England states, but the union collapsed after a failed strike, again in New England, in 1923.

A key organization seeking to promote interests of laboring women was the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), founded in 1903 and patterned after a similar organization in England. The WTUL sought legislation to improve workplace conditions and reduce hours for workers, sponsored educational activities, and campaigned for woman suffrage. It helped telephone operators organize their union, and in 1909 it supported the ILGWU’s massive strike against New York City sweatshops. Initially the WTUL’s highest offices were held by middle-class



women who sympathized with female wage laborers, but control shifted in the 1910s to forceful working-class leaders, notably Agnes Nestor, a glove maker; Rose Schneiderman, a cap maker; and Mary Anderson, a shoe worker. The WTUL advocated opening apprenticeship programs to women so they could enter skilled trades and training female workers to assume leadership roles. It served as a vital link between the labor and women's movements into the 1920s.

### The Experience of Wage Work

The dramatic labor struggles in the half-century following the Civil War make it easy to forget that only a small fraction of American wage workers belonged to unions. In 1900, about 1 million out of a total of 27.6 million workers were unionized. By 1920, union membership had grown to 5 million, still only 13 percent of the work force. Unionization was strong in construction trades, transportation, communications, and, to a lesser extent, manufacturing. For many workers, getting and keeping a job took priority over bargaining for higher wages and shorter hours. Job instability and the seasonal nature of work seriously hindered union-organizing efforts. Few companies employed a full work force year-round; most employers hired during peak seasons and laid workers off during slack periods. The 1880 census showed that in some communities, 30 percent of adult males had been jobless at some time during the previous year. Moreover, union organizers took no interest in large segments of the industrial labor force and intentionally barred others.

The millions of men, women, and children who were not unionized tried in their own ways to cope with pressures of the machine age. Increasing numbers, both native-born and immigrant, joined fraternal societies, such as the Polish Roman Catholic Union, the African American Colored Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Honor, and the Jewish B'nai B'rith. For small monthly or yearly contributions these organizations, widespread by the early twentieth century, provided members with life insurance, sickness benefits, and burial costs.

For most American workers, then, the machine age had mixed results. Industrial wages, though rarely generous, rose between 1877 and 1914, boosting purchasing power and creating a mass market for standardized goods. Yet in 1900 most employees worked sixty hours a week at wages that averaged 20 cents an hour for skilled work and 10 cents an hour for unskilled. And workers found that, even as wages rose, living costs increased even faster.

## STANDARDS OF LIVING

Some Americans distrusted a system that treated them like machines, but few could resist experts' claims that the industrial system was improving everyday life. The expansion of railroad, postal, and telephone service drew even once-isolated communities into the orbit of a consumer society. American ingenuity combined with mass production and mass marketing to make available myriad goods that previously had not existed or had been the exclusive property of the wealthy. As a result, Americans were better fed, better clothed, and better housed than ever before. The new material well-being, symbolized by canned foods, ready-made

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clothing, and home appliances, had a dual effect. It absorbed Americans into consumer communities defined not by place of residence but by possessions, and it accentuated differences between those who could afford goods and services and those who could not.

### **Commonplace Luxuries**

If a society's affluence is measured by how it converts luxuries into commonplace articles, the United States was indeed becoming affluent between 1880 and 1920. In 1880, only residents of Florida, Texas, and California could enjoy fresh oranges; smokers rolled their own cigarettes; and people made candy and soap at home. By 1899, manufactured goods and perishable foodstuffs had become increasingly available. That year, Americans consumed oranges at the rate of 100 crates for every 1,000 people, bought 2 billion machine-produced cigarettes, and spent averages of \$1.08 per person on store-bought candy and 63 cents per person on soap. By 1921, the transformation had advanced further. Americans smoked 43 billion cigarettes that year (403 per person), ate 248 crates of oranges per 1,000 people, and spent \$1.66 per person on confectionery goods and \$1.40 on soap.

What people can afford obviously depends on their resources and incomes. Data for the period show that incomes rose broadly. At the top of society, the expanding economy spawned massive fortunes and created a new industrial elite. An 1891 magazine article estimated that 120 Americans were worth at least \$10 million (\$250 million in current dollars). By 1920, the richest 5 percent of the population received almost one-fourth of all earned income. Incomes also rose among the middle class. For example, average pay for clerical workers rose 36 percent between 1890 and 1910 (see Table 18.1). In 1900, employees of the federal executive branch averaged \$1,072 a year, and college professors, \$1,100 (around \$30,000 in modern dollars)—not handsome sums, but much more than manual workers received. With such salaries, the middle class, whose numbers were increasing as a result of new job opportunities, could afford relatively comfortable housing. A six- or seven-room house cost around \$3,000 to buy or build (about \$70,000 in current dollars) and from \$15 to \$20 per month (\$400 to \$500 in current dollars) to rent.

Although hourly wages for industrial employees increased, workers had to expend a disproportionate amount of income on necessities. On average, annual wages of factory laborers rose about 30 percent, from \$486 in 1890 (about \$12,000 in modern dollars) to \$630 in 1910 (about \$15,500 in current dollars). In industries with large female work forces, such as shoe manufacturing, hourly pay rates remained lower than in male-dominated industries, such as coal mining and iron production. Regional variations were also wide. Nevertheless, as Table 18.1 shows, most wages moved upward. Income for farm laborers followed the same trend, though wages remained relatively low because farm workers usually received free room and board.

### **Cost of Living**

Wage increases mean little, however, if living costs rise as fast or faster. That is what happened. In few working-class occupations did incomes rise as fast as prices. The weekly cost of living for a typical wage earner's family of four rose over 47 percent between 1889 and 1913.

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TABLE 18.1 | AMERICAN LIVING STANDARDS, 1890–1910

	1890	1910
<b>Income and Earnings</b>		
Annual income		
Clerical worker	\$848	\$1,156
Public school teacher	256	492
Industrial worker	486	630
Farm laborer	233	336
Hourly wage		
Soft-coal miner	0.18*	0.21
Iron worker	0.17*	0.23
Shoe worker	0.14*	0.19
Paper worker	0.12*	0.17
<b>Labor Statistics</b>		
Number of people in labor force	28.5 million	41.7 million**
Average workweek in manufacturing	60 hours	51 hours

\*1892

\*\*1920

Thus, a combination of housing, food, and other goods that cost \$68 in 1889 increased, after a slight dip in the mid-1890s, to \$100 by 1913.

How, then, could working-class Americans afford machine-age goods and services? Many could not. The daughter of a textile worker, recalling her school days, described how “some of the kids would bring bars of chocolate, others an orange.... I suppose they were richer than a family like ours. My father used to buy a bag of candy and a bag of peanuts every payday.... And that’s all we’d have until the next payday.” Another woman explained how her family coped with high prices and low wages: “My mother made our clothes. People then wore old clothes. My mother would rip them out and make them over.”

### Supplements to Family Income

Still, a family could raise its income and partake modestly in consumer society by sending children and women into the labor market. In a household whose main breadwinner made \$600 a year, wages of other family members might lift total family income to \$800 or \$900. Many families also rented rooms to boarders and lodgers, a practice that could yield up to \$200 a year. These means of increasing family income enabled people to purchase important services. Between 1889 and 1901, working-class families markedly increased expenditures for life insurance and funeral policies as well as for new leisure activities (see Chapter 19). Workers were thus able to improve their living standard, but not without sacrifices.

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More than ever, American working people lived within a highly developed money economy. Between 1890 and 1920, the labor force increased by 50 percent, from 28 million workers to 42 million. These figures, however, are misleading because they represent a change in the nature of work as much as an increase in the number of available jobs. In rural households that predominated in the nineteenth century, women and children performed tasks crucial to a family's daily existence—cooking, cleaning, planting, and harvesting—but these jobs seldom appeared in employment figures because they earned no wages. As the nation industrialized and the agricultural sector's share of national income declined, paid employment became more common. Jobs in urban industries and commerce were easier to define and easier to count. The proportion of Americans who worked—whether in fields, households, factories, or offices—probably did not increase markedly. Most Americans, male and female, had always worked. What was new was the increase in paid employment, making purchases of consumer goods and services more affordable.

### Higher Life Expectancy

Science and technology eased some of life's struggles, and their impact on living standards strengthened after 1900.

Medical advances, better diets, and improved housing sharply reduced death rates and extended life. Between 1900 and 1920, life expectancy rose by fully six years, and the death rate dropped by 24 percent. Notable declines occurred in deaths from typhoid, diphtheria, influenza (except for a harsh pandemic in 1918 and 1919), tuberculosis, and intestinal ailments—diseases that had been scourges of earlier generations. There were, however, significantly more deaths from cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, afflictions of an aging population and of new environmental factors such as smoke and chemical pollution. Americans also found more ways to kill one another: although suicide rates remained stable, homicides and automobile-related deaths—effects of a fast-paced urban society—increased dramatically.

Not only were amenities and luxuries more available than in the previous half-century, means to upward mobility seemed more accessible as well. Although inequities that pervaded earlier eras remained in place, and race, gender, religion, and ethnicity still affected access to opportunity, education increasingly became the key to success. Public education, aided by construction of new schools and passage of laws that required children to stay in school to age fourteen, equipped young people to achieve a living standard higher than their parents'. Between 1890 and 1922, the number of students enrolled in public high schools rose dramatically, though by today's standards graduation rates among young people were low—16.3 percent in 1920, up from 3.5 percent in 1890. The creation of managerial and sales jobs in service industries helped to counter the downward mobility that resulted when mechanization pushed skilled workers out of their crafts. And the resulting goods of mass production meant that even workers found life more convenient.

### Flush Toilets and Other Innovations

At the vanguard of a revolution in lifestyles stood the toilet. The chain-pull, washdown water closet, invented in England around 1870, reached the United States in the 1880s. Shortly after 1900, the flush toilet appeared; thanks to mass

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production of enamel-coated metal fixtures, it became common in American homes and buildings. Cheap and easy to install, toilets brought about a shift in habits and attitudes. Before 1880, only luxury hotels and wealthy families had private indoor bathrooms. By the 1890s, the germ theory of disease was raising fears about carelessly disposed human waste as a source of infection and water contamination. Much more rapidly than Europeans, middle-class Americans combined a desire for cleanliness with an urge for convenience and began installing modern toilets in their urban houses. By the 1920s, toilets were prevalent in many working-class homes, too. Bodily functions took on an unpleasant image, and the home bathroom became a place of utmost privacy. Edward and Clarence Scott, who manufactured white tissue in perforated rolls, provided Americans a more convenient form of toilet tissue than the rough paper they had previously used. Plumbing advances thus belonged to a broader democratization of convenience that accompanied mass production and consumerism.

The tin can also altered lifestyles. Before the mid-nineteenth century, Americans typically ate only foods that were in season. Drying, smoking, and salting could preserve meat for a short time, but the availability of fresh meat and milk was limited; there was no way to prevent spoilage. A French inventor developed the cooking-and-sealing process of canning around 1810, and in the 1850s an American man named Gail Borden devised a means of condensing and preserving milk. Sales of canned goods and condensed milk increased during the 1860s, but processing some foods was difficult and cans had to be made by hand. In the 1880s, technology solved production problems. Inventors fashioned machines to peel fruits and vegetables as well as stamping and soldering machines to mass-produce cans from tin plate. Now, even people remote from markets, like sailors and cowboys, could readily consume tomatoes, milk, oysters, and other alternatives to previously monotonous diets. Housewives preserved their own fruits and vegetables, “putting up” foods in sealed glass jars.

Other trends and inventions broadened Americans’ diets. Growing urban populations created demands that encouraged fruit and vegetable farmers to raise more produce. Railroad refrigerator cars enabled growers and meatpackers to ship perishables greater distances and to preserve them for longer periods. By the 1890s, northern city dwellers could enjoy southern and western strawberries, grapes, and tomatoes for several months of the year. Home iceboxes enabled middle-class families to store perishables. An easy means of producing ice commercially was invented in the 1870s, and by 1900 the nation had two thousand ice plants, most of which made home deliveries.

**Dietary Reform** Availability of new foods also inspired health advocates to reform American diets. In the 1870s, John H. Kellogg, nutritionist at the Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek, Michigan, began serving patients health foods, including peanut butter and wheat flakes. Several years later, his brother, William K. Kellogg, invented corn flakes, and another nutritionist, Charles W. Post, introduced Grape-Nuts, revolutionizing breakfast by replacing eggs, potatoes, and meat with ready-to-eat cereal, which supposedly was healthier. Like Edison and Ford, Post believed in the power of

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advertising, and he personally wrote ads for his products. His company became one of the fastest growing in the country.

Other developments affected the ways people prepared and consumed food. Just before the First World War, scientists discovered the dietetic value of vitamins A and B (C and D were discovered later). Growing numbers of cookbooks and the opening of cooking schools reflected heightened interest in food's possibilities for health and enjoyment. Home gardens in urban backyards also became easier to tend, aided by the Burpee Company, founded in 1876, which mailed flower and vegetable seeds to gardeners who bought them through mail-order catalogues—just as they bought goods from Sears, Roebuck.

As in the past, the poorest people still consumed cheap foods, heavy in starches and carbohydrates. Southern textile workers, for example, ate corn mush and fat-back (the strip of meat from a hog's back) almost every day. Poor urban families seldom could afford meat. Now, though, many of them could purchase previously unavailable fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. Workers had to spend a high percentage of their income on food—almost half of a breadwinner's wages—but they never suffered the severe malnutrition that plagued other developing nations.

### Ready-Made Clothing

Just as cans and iceboxes made many foods more common, the sewing machine and standardized sizes sparked a revolution in clothing. The sewing machine, invented in Europe but refined in the mid-nineteenth century by Americans Elias Howe Jr. and Isaac M. Singer, facilitated clothing and shoe manufacture. Demand for uniforms during the Civil War boosted the ready-made (as opposed to custom-made) clothing industry, and by 1890 annual retail sales of machine-made garments reached \$1.5 billion. Mass production enabled manufacturers to turn out good-quality apparel at relatively low cost and to standardize sizes to fit different body shapes. By 1900, only the poorest families could not afford “ready-to-wear” clothes. Tailors and seamstresses were relegated to repair work. Many women continued to make clothing at home, to save money or as a hobby, but commercial dress patterns intended for use with a sewing machine simplified home production and injected another form of standardization into everyday life.

Mass-produced garments altered clothing styles and tastes. Restrictive Victorian designs still dominated female fashion, but women were abandoning the most burdensome features. As women's participation in work and leisure activities became more active, dress designers placed greater emphasis on comfort. In the 1890s, long sleeves and skirt hemlines receded, and high-boned collars disappeared. Women began wearing factory-made tailored blouses called shirtwaists. For comfort, designers used less fabric; by the 1920s, a dress required three yards of material instead of ten. Petite prevailed as the ideal: the most desirable waist measurement was eighteen to twenty inches, and corsets were big sellers. In the early 1900s, long hair tied up behind the neck was the most popular style. By the First World War, when many women worked in hospitals and factories, shorter hairstyles had become acceptable.

Men's clothes, too, became lightweight and stylish. Before 1900, men in the middle and well-off working classes would have owned two suits: one for Sundays

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and special occasions, and one for everyday wear. After 1900, however, manufacturers began producing inexpensive garments from fabrics of different weights and for different seasons. Men replaced derbies with felt hats, and stiff collars and cuffs with soft ones; somber, dark-blue serge gave way to lighter shades and more intricate weaves. Workingmen still needed durable, inexpensive overalls, shirts, and shoes. But even for males of modest means, clothing was becoming something to be bought instead of made and remade by wives and mothers.

**Department and Chain Stores** Department stores and chain stores helped to create and serve this new consumerism. Between 1865 and 1900, Macy's Department Store in New York, Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, Marshall Field in Chicago, and the Emporium in San Francisco became urban landmarks. Previously, working classes bought goods in stores with limited inventories, and wealthier people patronized fancy shops; prices, quality of goods, and social custom discouraged each from shopping at the other's establishments. Now, department stores, with open displays of clothing, housewares, and furniture—available in large quantities to anyone with the purchase price—caused a merchandising revolution. They offered not only variety but also home deliveries, exchange policies, and charge accounts.

Meanwhile, the Great Atlantic Tea Company, founded in 1859, became the first grocery chain. Renamed the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company in 1869 (ultimately known as A&P), the firm bought in volume and sold to the public at low prices. By 1915, there were eighteen hundred A&P stores, and twelve thousand more were built over the next ten years. Other chains, such as Woolworth's dime stores, which sold inexpensive personal items and novelties, grew rapidly during the same period.

**Advertising** A society of scarcity does not need advertising: when demand exceeds supply, producers have no trouble selling what they market. But in a society of rising abundance, such as industrial America, supply frequently outstrips demand, necessitating a means to create and increase demand. Advertising assumed this function. In 1865, retailers spent about \$9.5 million on advertising; that sum reached \$95 million by 1900 and nearly \$500 million by 1919.

In the late nineteenth century, companies that mass-produced consumer goods hired advertisers to create "consumption communities," bodies of consumers loyal to a particular brand name. In 1881, Congress passed a trademark law enabling producers to register and protect brand names. Thousands of companies registered products as varied as Hires Root Beer, Uneeda Biscuits, and Carter's Little Liver Pills. Advertising agencies—a service pioneered by N. W. Ayer & Son of Philadelphia—offered expert advice to firms that wished to cultivate brand loyalty. Newspapers served as the prime instrument for advertising. In the mid-nineteenth century, publishers began to pursue higher revenues by selling more ad space. Wanamaker's placed the first full-page ad in 1879, and advertisers began using large print and elaborate illustrations of products. Such attention-getting techniques

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transformed advertising into news. More than ever before, people read newspapers to find out what was for sale as well as what was happening.

Outdoor billboards and electrical signs rivaled newspapers as important selling devices. Billboards on city buildings, in railroad stations, and alongside roads promoted such products as Gillette razors, Wrigley chewing gum, and Budweiser beer. In the mid-1890s, electric lights made billboards more dynamic and appealing. Commercial districts sparkled under what one observer called “a medium of motion, of action, of *life*, of *light*, of compulsory attraction.” The flashing electrical signs on New York City’s Broadway—including a forty-five-foot Heinz pickle in green bulbs and dazzling theater marquees—gave the street its label “the Great White Way.” Soon, “talking” signs were installed, with words moving along signboards providing news as well as advertising copy in a multitude of colors. Americans now had an enticing variety of inducements to consume.

## THE CORPORATE CONSOLIDATION MOVEMENT

Neither new products nor new marketing techniques could mask unsettling factors in the American economy. The huge capital investment needed for new technology required that factories operate at near capacity to recover costs. But the more manufacturers produced, the more they had to expand markets for their products.

*Advertising, which developed into a powerful medium in the late nineteenth century, used explicit and implicit domestic images to reinforce a wife’s role as homemaker. This ad implies that a devoted wife lovingly assumes such tasks as sewing and mending clothing, guided into her role by a strong and superior husband.*





To sell more and outdo competitors, they had to advertise and reduce prices. To compensate for advertising costs and low prices, they further expanded production and often reduced wages. To expand, they raised capital by selling stock and borrowing money from commercial banks, savings banks, insurance companies, and investment houses. And to repay loans and reward stockholders, they had to produce and sell even more. This spiraling process strangled small firms that could not keep pace and thrust workers into constant uncertainty. Similar cycles also unsettled commerce, banking, and transportation.

In this environment of unregulated expansion, optimism could dissolve at the hint that debtors could not meet their obligations. Economic downturns occurred with painful regularity—1873, 1884, 1893. Business leaders disagreed on what caused these strains. Some blamed overproduction; others pointed to underconsumption; still others blamed lax credit and investment practices. Whatever the explanation, businesspeople began seeking ways to combat the uncertainty of boom-and-bust cycles by creating increasingly tighter and larger forms of centralized organization.

### Rise of Corporations

Industrialists never questioned the capitalist system. They sought new ways to enlarge the base that had supported economic growth since the early 1800s, when states liberalized incorporation laws to encourage commerce and industry. Under such laws, almost anyone could start a company and raise money by selling stock. Stockholders (investors) shared in profits without personal risk because laws limited their liability for company debts to the amount of their own investment; the rest of their wealth was protected from creditors should the company fail. Nor did investors need to concern themselves with a firm's day-to-day operation; responsibility for company administration rested with its managers.

Corporations proved the best instruments to raise capital for industrial expansion, and by 1900 two-thirds of all goods manufactured in the United States were produced by corporate firms such as General Electric and the American Tobacco Company. Corporations won judicial protection in the 1880s and 1890s when the Supreme Court ruled that they, like individuals, are protected by the Fourteenth Amendment, meaning that states could not deny corporations equal protection under the law nor deprive them of property rights without due process of law. Such rulings insulated corporations from government interference in their operations.

### Pools and Trusts

Between the late 1880s and early 1900s, a number of massive corporate conglomerates formed that have since dominated the nation's economy. At first, such alliances were tentative and informal, consisting mainly of cooperative agreements called *pools* among firms that manufactured the same product or offered the same service. Through these arrangements, competing companies tried to control the market by agreeing how much each should produce and by sharing profits. Such "gentlemen's agreements" worked during good times when there was enough business for all; but during slow periods, desire for profits often tempted pool members to secretly reduce prices or sell more than the agreed quota.

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In 1879, one of John D. Rockefeller’s lawyers, Samuel Dodd, devised a more reliable means of dominating a market. Dodd suggested adapting a legal device called a *trust*, in which one company could control an industry by luring or forcing stockholders of smaller companies in that industry to yield control of their stock “in trust” to the larger company’s board of trustees. This method allowed Rockefeller to achieve *horizontal integration*—the control of similar companies—of the profitable petroleum industry in 1882 by combining his corporation with other refineries.

### Holding Companies

In 1888, New Jersey adopted laws allowing corporations chartered there to own property and stock in other corporations in other states. (Trusts provided for trusteeship, not ownership.) This liberalization facilitated creation of the *holding company*, which owned a partial or complete interest in other companies and merged their holdings’ assets (buildings, equipment, inventory, and cash) under single management. Under this arrangement, Rockefeller’s holding company combined forty formerly independent operations into Standard Oil of New Jersey. By 1898, Standard Oil refined 84 percent of all oil produced in the nation, controlled most pipelines, and engaged in natural-gas production and ownership of oil-producing properties. To dominate their markets, many holding companies sought control over all aspects of the industry, including raw-materials extraction, product manufacture, and distribution. A model of such *vertical integration*, which fused related businesses under unified management, was Gustavus Swift’s Chicago meat-processing operation. During the 1880s, Swift invested in livestock, slaughterhouses, refrigerator cars, and marketing to ensure profits from meat sales at prices he could control. With their widespread operations, both Swift & Company and Standard Oil extended economic tentacles to all regions of the nation.

Mergers provided answers to industry’s search for orderly profits. Between 1889 and 1903, some three hundred combinations were formed, most of them trusts and holding companies. Other mammoth combinations included Amalgamated Copper Company, American Sugar Refining Company, and U.S. Rubber Company. At the same time, these huge companies ruthlessly put thousands of small firms out of business.

### Financiers

The merger movement created a new species of businessman, one whose vocation was financial organizing rather than producing a particular good. Shrewd investors sought opportunities for combination, formed a holding company, raised money by selling stock and borrowing from banks, then persuaded producers to sell their firms to the new company. Their attention ranged widely. W. H. Moore organized the American Tin Plate Company, Diamond Match Company, National Biscuit Company, and the Rock Island Railroad. Elbert H. Gary similarly participated in consolidation of the barbed-wire industry and of U.S. Steel. Investment bankers such as J. P. Morgan and Jacob Schiff piloted the merger movement, inspiring awe with their financial power and organizational skills.

Growth of corporations turned stock and bond exchanges into hubs of activity. In 1886, trading on the New York Stock Exchange passed 1 million shares a day.

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By 1914, the number of industrial stocks traded reached 511, compared with 145 in 1869. Between 1870 and 1900, foreign investment in American companies rose from \$1.5 billion to \$3.5 billion, as the country's economy assumed the image of a safe and lucrative investment. Assets of savings banks, concentrated in the Northeast and on the West Coast, rose by 700 percent between 1875 and 1897. These institutions, along with commercial banks and insurance companies, invested heavily in railroads and industrial enterprises. As one journal, exaggerating capitalists' optimism, proclaimed, "Nearly the whole country (including the typical widow and orphan) is interested in the stock market."

## THE GOSPEL OF WEALTH AND ITS CRITICS

Business leaders used corporate consolidation to minimize competition. To justify their tactics, they invoked the doctrine of Social Darwinism. Developed by British philosopher Herbert Spencer and preached in the United States by Yale professor William Graham Sumner, Social Darwinism loosely grafted Charles Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest onto *laissez faire*, the doctrine that government should not interfere in private economic matters. Social Darwinists reasoned that, in a free-market economy, wealth would flow naturally to those most capable of handling it. Acquisition and possession of property were thus sacred and deserved rights. Civilization depended on this system, explained Sumner. "If we do not like the survival of the fittest," he wrote, "we have only one possible alternative, and that is survival of the unfittest." In this view, large corporations represented the natural accumulation of economic power by those best suited for wielding it.

Social Darwinists reasoned, too, that wealth carried moral responsibilities to provide for those less fortunate or less capable. Steel baron Andrew Carnegie asserted what he called "the Gospel of Wealth," meaning that he and other industrialists, as guardians of society's wealth, had a duty to serve society in humane ways. Over his lifetime, Carnegie donated more than \$350 million to libraries, schools, peace initiatives, and the arts. Such philanthropy, however, also implied a right for benefactors such as Rockefeller and Carnegie to define what was good and necessary for society; it did not translate into paying workers decent wages.

### Government Assistance to Business

Like western entrepreneurs who lauded rugged individualism while seeking public subsidies in their mining, railroad, and agricultural businesses, leaders in the corporate consolidation movement extolled independent initiative while requesting government assistance. They denounced efforts to legislate maximum working hours or to regulate factory conditions as interference with natural economic laws, but they lobbied forcefully for public subsidies and tax relief to encourage business growth. Grants to railroads (see Chapter 17) were one form of such assistance. Tariffs, which benefited American products by placing taxes on imported products, were another. Since the inception of tariffs in the early nineteenth century, industrialists argued that tariff protection encouraged the development of new products and enterprises. But tariffs also forced consumers to pay artificially high prices for many goods.

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## Dissenting Voices

While defenders such as Carnegie and Rockefeller insisted that trusts and other forms of big business were natural outcomes of economic development, critics charged that these methods were unnatural because they stifled opportunity and originated from greed. Such charges, emanating from farmers, workers, and intellectuals, reflected a fear of monopoly—the domination of an economic activity (such as oil refining) by one powerful company (such as Standard Oil). Those who feared monopoly believed that large corporations fixed prices, exploited workers, destroyed opportunity by crushing small businesses, and threatened democracy by corrupting politicians—all of which was not only unnatural but immoral.

Critics believed they knew a better, more ethical path to progress. By the mid-1880s, a few intellectuals began to challenge Social Darwinism and laissez-faire economics. Much of their thought derived from the philosophy of pragmatism espoused by philosopher and psychologist William James. Though he accepted Darwin's theory of evolution because it meant that nature was full of change, James believed that human will, independent of the environment, could alter existence. To James, truth was relative; something was true if humans accepted it as true. Such a pragmatic belief meant that social relationships were not fixed by immutable law, as Social Darwinists implied; rather, humans, especially those selected by society, could bring about change.

Sociologist Lester Ward, in his book *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), similarly argued that human control of nature, not natural law, accounted for civilization's advance. A system that guaranteed survival only to the fittest was wasteful and brutal; instead, Ward reasoned, cooperative activity fostered by government intervention was more just. Economists Richard Ely, John R. Commons, and Edward Bemis agreed that natural forces should be harnessed for the public good. They denounced laissez-faire for its “unsound morals” and praised the positive assistance that government could offer to ordinary people.

Whereas academics endorsed intervention in the natural economic order, visionaries such as Henry George and Edward Bellamy questioned why the United States had to have so many poor people while a few became fabulously wealthy. George, a printer with only a seventh-grade education, was an avid reader of economic theory. Alarmed at the poverty among working people like himself, he came to believe that inequality stemmed from the ability of a few to profit from rising land values and the ever-higher rents they charged. Unlike wages paid to workers, wealth from landowning was created without any productive effort. To prevent profiteering, George proposed to replace all taxes with a “single tax” on the “unearned increment”—the rise in property values caused by increased market demand rather than by owners' improvements. George's scheme, argued in *Progress and Poverty* (1879), had great popular appeal and almost won him the mayoralty of New York City in 1886.

Unlike George, who accepted private ownership, novelist Edward Bellamy believed competitive capitalism promoted waste. Instead, he proposed a state in which government owned the means of production. Bellamy outlined his dream in *Looking Backward* (1888). The novel, which sold over a million copies, depicted Boston in the year 2000 as a peaceful community where everyone had a job and a council of benevolent elders managed the economy. In Bellamy's utopia, a

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“principle of fraternal cooperation” replaced vicious competition and wasteful monopoly. His vision, which he called “Nationalism,” sparked formation of Nationalist clubs across the country and kindled appeals for political reform, social welfare measures, and government ownership of railroads and utilities.

### Antitrust Legislation

Few people supported the government ownership envisioned by Bellamy, but several states took steps to prohibit monopolies and regulate business. By 1900, twenty-seven states had laws forbidding pools and fifteen had constitutional provisions outlawing trusts. Most were agricultural states in the South and West that were responding to anti-monopolistic pressure from farm organizations (see Chapter 20). But state governments lacked the staff and judicial support for an effective attack on big business, and corporations found ways to evade restrictions. Only national legislation, it seemed, could work.

Congress moved hesitantly toward such legislation but in 1890 passed the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Introduced by Senator John Sherman of Ohio, the law made illegal “every contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy in the restraint of trade.” Those found guilty of violating the law faced fines and jail terms, and those wronged by illegal combinations could sue for triple damages. However, the law was left purposely vague and watered down when it was rewritten by pro-business eastern senators. It did not clearly define “restraint of trade” and consigned interpretation of its provisions to the courts, which at the time were allies of business.

Judges used the law’s vagueness to blur distinctions between reasonable and unreasonable restraints of trade. When in 1895 the federal government prosecuted the Sugar Trust for owning 98 percent of the nation’s sugar-refining capacity, eight of nine Supreme Court justices ruled in *U.S. v. E. C. Knight Co.* that control of manufacturing did not necessarily mean control of trade. According to the Court, the Constitution empowered Congress to regulate interstate commerce, but manufacturing (which in the *Knights* case took place entirely within Pennsylvania) did not fall under congressional control.

Between 1890 and 1900, the federal government prosecuted only eighteen cases under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The most successful involved railroads directly involved in interstate commerce. Ironically, the act equipped the government with a tool for breaking up labor unions: courts that did not consider monopolistic production a restraint on trade willingly applied antitrust provisions to boycotts encouraged by striking unions.

## SUMMARY

Mechanization and inventions thrust the United States, once just a developing country, into the vanguard of industrial nations. By the early twentieth century, American industrial output surpassed that of Great Britain, France, and Germany combined. Industrial growth transformed the national economy and freed the United States from dependence on European capital and manufactured goods. Imports and foreign investments still flowed into the United States. But by 1900,

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factories, stores, and banks were converting America from a debtor, agricultural nation into an industrial, financial, and exporting power. In addition, developments in electrical power, steel production, internal-combustion engines, and chemistry immeasurably altered daily life at home and abroad.

But in industry, as in farming and mining, massive size and aggressive consolidation engulfed the individual, changing the nature of work from a singular activity undertaken by skilled producers to mass production undertaken by wage earners. Laborers fought to retain control of their work and struggled to organize unions to meet their needs. The outpouring of products created a mass society based on consumerism and dominated by technology and the communications media.

The problems of enforcing the Sherman Anti-Trust Act reflected the uneven distribution of power. Corporations consolidated to control resources, production, and politics. Laborers and reformers had numbers and ideas but lacked influence. They benefited from material gains that technology and mass production provided, but they accused businesses of acquiring too much influence and profiting at their expense. In factories and homes, some people celebrated the economic transformation, while others struggled with the dilemma of industrialism: whether new accumulations of wealth would undermine the ideal of a republic based on republicanism, democracy, and equality.

The march of industrial expansion proved almost impossible to stop, however, because so many people, powerful and ordinary, were benefiting from it. Moreover, the waves of newcomers pouring into the nation's cities were increasingly furnishing both workers and consumers for America's expanding productive capacity. The dynamo of American vitality now rested in its urban centers.