The Culture of the Plains Indians 2.1

Life on the Plains

Great Plains—grasslands in west-central portion of the U.S.
East: hunting, farming villages; west: nomadic hunting, gathering

The Horse and the Buffalo

Horses, guns lead most Plains tribes to nomadic life by mid-1700s
Trespassing others’ hunting lands causes war; count coup for status
Buffalo provides many basic needs:
— worship without formal ministers
— meat used for jerky....all parts of the buffalo used.
Native Americans relied on **buffalo** for many things.

1. **HORNS**: cups, spoons, ladles, headdresses
2. **SKULL**: ceremonies, prayer
3. **TONGUE**: meat, hairbrushes
4. **HAIR**: headdresses, pillows, rope, bridles
5. **BONES**: knives, arrowheads, awls, dice, splints
6. **HIDE (tanned)**: moccasins, bedding, clothing, bags, tepee linings
7. **HIDE (raw)**: food pouches, headdresses, clothing, glue, rattles
8. **TAIL**: flyswatters, tepee decoration
9. **MUSCLES AND SINEW**: bows, thread
10. **HOOVES**: rattles, glue
11. **PAUNCH**: cooking pots, water container
12. **DUNG**: fuel, signals
Lived in small family groups
   Usually with ties to others that spoke the same language.
Men were the hunters and warriors
   Women helped prepare the food.
They believed in powerful spirits
   Spirit leaders were called shamans or medicine men or women.
The Government Restricts Native Americans

**Railroads Influence Government Policy**
- 1834, government designates Great Plains as one huge reservation
- 1850s, treaties define specific boundaries for each tribe

**Massacre at Sand Creek**
- Troops kill over 150 Cheyenne, Arapaho at Sand Creek winter camp

**Death on the Bozeman Trail**
- Bozeman Trail crosses Sioux hunting grounds

**Treaty of Fort Laramie**—U.S. closes trail; Sioux to reservation

**Sitting Bull**, leader of Sioux, does not sign treaty

**Red River War**
- 1868, Kiowa, Comanche engage in 6 years of raiding
- 1874–1875, U.S. Army crushes resistance on Plains in Red River War
Some critics attacked government policies and defended the Indians’ way of life.

- Most leaders, however, hoped that Native Americans would assimilate into American life.

- In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act to encourage assimilation.

  Replaced the reservation system with an allotment system.
  Granted each Indian family its own plot of land.
  Specified the land could not be sold for 25 years.
Wounded Knee

Ghost Dance—ritual to regain lost lands—spreads among Sioux on Dakota reservation

Dec. 1890, Sitting Bull is killed when police try to arrest him

Seventh Cavalry takes about 350 Sioux to Wounded Knee Creek

Battle of Wounded Knee—cavalry kill 300 unarmed Native Americans

Battle ends Indian wars, Sioux dream of regaining old life
The Lure of Silver and Gold

1858 discovery of gold in Colorado draws tens of thousands
Mining camps, tiny frontier towns have filthy, ramshackle dwellings
Fortune seekers of different cultures, races; mostly men

Gold –

Pike’s Peak, Colorado 1858
Black Hills, South Dakota

Silver –

Comstock Lode – in Nevada, lasted for more than 20 years! Miners make nearly $500 million

Placer mining allowed individuals to pan for gold, but soon equipment and different techniques were needed to dig deeper within the earth hydraulic mining and hard-rock mining methods.
Cowboys

American settlers learn to manage large herds from Mexican natives — adopt way of life, clothing, vocabulary

Texas **longhorns** — sturdy, short-tempered breeds brought by Spanish Cowboys not in demand until railroads reach Great Plains 1866–1885, up to 55,000 cowboys on plains — 25% African American, 12% Mexican

Growing Demand for Beef

After Civil War demand for meat increases in rapidly growing cities

The Cow Town

Cattlemen establish shipping yards where trails and rail lines meet **Chisholm Trail** becomes major cattle route from San Antonio to Kansas
The Long Drive
Herding of animals or **long drive** lasts about 3 months
Cowboy in saddle dawn to dusk; sleeps on ground; bathes in rivers
1866-1885 up to 55,000 cowboys on plains
-25% African American, 12% Mexican
By the mid-1880s, however, the cattle boom was coming to an end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons the open-range system ended</th>
<th>The invention of barbed wire made fencing cheap.</th>
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<td>The supply of beef exceeded demand and prices dropped.</td>
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<td>Extreme weather led to the death of herds.</td>
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Railroads Open the West
1850–1871, huge land grants to railroads for laying track in West
1860s, Central Pacific goes east, Union Pacific west, meet in Utah
By 1880s, 5 transcontinental railroads completed

Railroads sell land to farmers, attract many European immigrants
Railroad, speculators profit; 10% of land to families
Government strengthens act, passes new legislation
Like miners and ranchers, farmers also moved west, looking for a better life.

Under the 1862 Homestead Act, the government gave 160 acres to farmers willing to tend it.

Easterners, Exodusters, and immigrants soon poured onto the Great Plains.
Dugouts and Soddies

Few trees, so many settlers dig homes into sides of ravines or hills. In plains, make soddy or sod home by stacking blocks of turf.

-Women’s Work-

Homesteaders virtually alone, must be self-sufficient.

Women do men’s work—plowing, harvesting, shearing sheep.

Do traditional work—making soap, canning vegetables.

Work for communities—sponsor schools, churches.
Mass market for farm machines develops with migration to plains

Agricultural Education

**Morrill Act** of 1862, 1890 finances agricultural colleges

1887 Hatch Act creates agricultural experiment stations

Farmers in Debt

Railroads, investors create **bonanza farms**— huge, single-crop spreads

1885–1890 droughts bankrupt single-crop operations

Rising cost of shipping grain pushes farmers into debt
Farmers Unite to Address Common Problems

Economic Distress

Farmers buy more land to grow more crops to pay off debts

Prices of crops fall dramatically

1870s, debtors push government to put more money in circulation

1878 Bland-Allison Act—money supply increase not enough for farmers
Farmers created groups to address their problems, railroads and banks. These groups formed a network called the Granger movement. The Grange was formally organized by Oliver H. Kelley in 1867 and gained a million members.

The Grange declined after the 1870s, but Farmers’ Alliances became important reform organizations that continued the Grange’s goals.
The Populist Party Platform

**Populism**—movement of the people; Populist Party wants reforms
Economic: increase money supply, graduated income tax, federal loans
Political: Senate elected by popular vote; secret ballot; 8-hour day

1892, Populist candidates elected at different levels of government — Democratic Party eventually adopts platform

The Panic of 1893

Railroads expand faster than markets; some go bankrupt
Government’s gold supply depleted, leads to rush on banks — businesses, banks collapse — panic becomes depression (not THE Depression)
Silver or Gold

Political divisions also regional:

- Republicans: Northeast business owners, bankers
- Democrats: Southern, Western farmers, laborers

**Bimetallism**—system using both silver and gold to back currency

**Gold standard**—backing currency with gold only

Paper money considered worthless if cannot be exchanged for metal

**Silverites**: bimetallism would create more money, stimulate economy

**Gold bugs**: gold only would create more stable, if expensive currency

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<th>Silverites</th>
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<td>• Gold standard</td>
<td>• Bimetallism</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Supported by bankers and factory owners</td>
<td>• Supported by farmers and workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Effects</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prices fall</td>
<td>- Prices rise</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Less money in circulation</td>
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Bryan and the “Cross of Gold”

1896, Republicans commit to gold, select William McKinley. Democrats favor bimetallism, choose William Jennings Bryan. Populists endorse Bryan, choose own VP to maintain party identity.

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The End of Populism

McKinley gets East, industrial Midwest; Bryan South, farm Midwest. McKinley elected president; Populism collapses; leaves legacy:

— the powerless can organize, have political impact
— agenda of reforms enacted in 20th century