In 1873, Milton Leeper, his wife, Hattie, and their baby, Anna, climbed into a wagon piled high with their possessions and set out to homestead in Boone County, Nebraska. Once on the claim, the Leepers dreamed confidently of their future. Hattie wrote to her sister in Iowa, “I like our place the best of any around here. When we get a fine house and 100 acres under cultivation,” she added, “I wouldn’t trade with any
one.” But Milton had broken only 13 acres when disaster struck. Hordes of grasshoppers appeared, and the Leepers fled their claim and took refuge in the nearby town of Fremont.

There they stayed for two years. Milton first worked at a store and then hired out to other farmers. Hattie sewed, kept a boarder, and cared for chickens and a milk cow. The family lived on the brink of poverty but never gave up hope. “Times are hard and we have had bad luck,” Hattie acknowledged, but “I am going to hold that claim . . . there will [be] one gal that won’t be out of a home.” In 1876, the Leepers triumphantly returned to their claim with the modest sum of $27 to help them start over.

The grasshoppers were gone, there was enough rain, and preaching was only half a mile away. The Leepers, like others, began to prosper. Two more daughters were born and cared for in the comfortable sod house—“homely” on the outside but plastered and cozy within. As Hattie explained, the homesteaders lived “just as civilized as they would in Chicago.”

Their luck did not last. Hattie, pregnant again, fell ill and died in childbirth along with her infant son. Heartbroken, Milton buried his wife and child and left the claim. The last frontier had momentarily defeated him, although he would try farming in at least four other locations before his death in 1905.

The same year that the Leepers established their Boone County homestead, another family tried their luck in a Danish settlement about 200 miles west of Omaha. Rasmus and Ane Ebbesen and their eight-year-old son, Peter, had arrived in the United States from Denmark in 1868, lured by the promise of an “abundance” of free land “for all willing to cultivate it.” By 1870, they had made it as far west as Council Bluffs, Iowa. There they stopped to earn the capital that would be necessary to begin farming. Rasmus dug ditches for the railroad, Ane worked as a cleaning woman in a local boardinghouse, and young Peter brought drinking water to thirsty laborers who were digging ditches for the town gas works.

Like the Leepers, the Ebbesens eagerly settled on their homestead and began to cultivate the soil. Peter later recalled that the problems that the family had anticipated never materialized. Even the rumors that the Sioux, “flying demons” in the eyes of settlers, were on the rampage proved false. The real problems the family faced were unexpected: rattlesnakes, prairie fires, and an invasion of grasshoppers. The grasshoppers were just as devastating to the Ebbesen farm as they had been to the Leeper homestead. But unlike the Leepers, the Ebbesens stayed on the claim. Although the family “barely had enough” to eat, they survived the three years of grasshopper infestation.

In the following years, the Ebbesens thrived. Rasmus had almost all the original 80 acres under cultivation and purchased an additional 80 acres from the railroad. A succession of sod houses rose on the land and finally even a two-story frame house, paid for with money Peter earned teaching school. By the time they were in their 50s, they could look with pride at their “luxurient and promising crop.” But once more natural disaster struck: a “violent hailstorm . . . which completely devastated the whole lot.” The Ebbesens were lucky, however. A banker offered to buy them out, although the amount was $1,000 less than what the family calculated as the farm’s “real worth.” But it was enough for the purchase of a “modest” house in town. Later, there was even a “dwelling of two stories and nine rooms . . . with adjacent park.”

The stories of the Leepers and the Ebbesens, though different in their details and endings, hint at some of the problems confronting rural Americans in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As a mature industrial economy transformed agriculture and shifted the balance of economic power permanently away from America’s farmlands to the country’s cities and factories, many farmers found it impossible to realize the traditional dream of
rural independence and prosperity. Even bountiful harvests no longer guaranteed success. "We were told two years ago to go to work and raise a big crop; that was all we needed," said one farmer. "We went to work and plowed and planted; the rains fell, the sun shone, nature smiled, and we raised the big crop they told us to; and what came of it? Eight cent corn, ten cent oats, two cent beef and no price at all for butter and eggs—that's what came of it." Native Americans also discovered that changes in rural life threatened their values and dreams. As the Sioux leader Red Cloud told railroad surveyors in Wyoming, "We do not want you here. You are scaring away the buffalo."

This chapter explores several of this book's basic themes as it analyzes the agricultural transformation of the late nineteenth century. Highlighting the ways in which rural Americans—red, white, yellow, and black—joined the industrial world, it asks how diverse groups responded to new economic and social conditions. The rise of large-scale agriculture in the West, the exploitation of its natural resources, and the development of the Great Plains form a backdrop for discussing the impact of white settlement on western tribes and assessing how well native peoples were able to preserve their culture and traditions. In an analysis of the South, the efforts of whites to create a "New South" form a contrast to the underlying realities of race and cotton. Although the chapter shows that discrimination and economic peonage characterized the lives of most black southerners during this period, it also describes the rise of new black protest tactics and ideologies. Finally, the chapter highlights the ways in which agricultural problems of the late nineteenth century, which would continue to characterize much of agricultural life in the twentieth century, led American farmers to become reformers.
MODERNIZING AGRICULTURE

Between 1865 and 1900, the nation’s farms more than doubled in number as Americans flocked west of the Mississippi. Farmers raised specialized crops with modern machinery and sped them to market over an expanding railroad system. And they became capitalists, and, as one farmer observed, had to “understand farming as a business.”

While small family farms still typified American agriculture, vast mechanized operations devoted to the cultivation of one crop appeared, especially west of the Mississippi River. The bonanza farms, established in the late 1870s on the northern plains, symbolized the trend to large-scale agriculture. Thousands of acres in size, these wheat farms required large capital investments; corporations owned many of them. Like factories, they depended on machinery, hired hundreds of workers, and relied on efficient managers. Although bonanza farms were not typical, they dramatized the agricultural changes that were occurring everywhere on a smaller scale.

Despite their success in adapting farming to modern conditions, farmers were slipping from their dominant position in the workforce. In 1860, they represented almost 60 percent of the labor force; by 1900, less than 37 percent of employed Americans farmed. At the same time, farmers’ contribution to the nation’s wealth declined from one-third to one-quarter.

American Agriculture and the World

The expansion of American agriculture was tied to changing global patterns and demands. During the nineteenth century, the population of Europe exploded, growing from 175 million in 1800 to 435 million in 1910. While some Europeans continued to till the land, increasing numbers abandoned farming and drifted into cities to find industrial work. In Britain, farmers, who made up only 10 percent of the total workforce, could not produce nearly enough to feed the nation. Like other European countries, Great Britain had to import substantial supplies of food for its citizens. The growing demand prompted American farmers along with their counterparts in eastern Europe, Australia, and New Zealand to expand their operations for the European market.

In their attempts to improve crop yields and livestock, American farmers both benefited from and contributed to trends in agriculture elsewhere in the world. German scientists facilitated agricultural expansion after 1850 by developing better seeds, livestock, and chemical fertilizers. The land-grant university system in the United States, established during the Civil War, ensured that American agriculturists would continue to have access to research into and development of better strains of crops and animals and more effective farming methods. For their part, American farmers led the way in using farm machinery such as the horse-drawn harvester, showing farmers elsewhere in the world the way to raise bigger harvests.
This integration into the wider world depended on improved transportation at home and abroad. Reliable, cheap transportation in the United States allowed farmers to specialize: wheat on the Great Plains, corn in the Midwest. Eastern farmers turned to vegetable, fruit, and dairy farming—or sold out. Cotton, tobacco, wheat, and rice dominated in the South, and grain, fruits, and vegetables were prevalent in the Far West. The development of steamships and an ever-expanding network of railroad systems in Europe ensured that American goods and products could move swiftly, efficiently, and cheaply across land and sea to distant markets.

As farmers specialized for national and international markets, their success depended increasingly on outside forces and demands. Bankers and investors, many of them European, provided the capital to improve transportation and expand operations; intermediaries stored and sometimes sold produce; and railroads and steamships carried it to market. A prosperous economy at home and abroad put money into laborers’ pockets for food purchases. But when several European countries banned American pork imports between 1879 and 1883, fearing trichinosis, American stock raisers suffered. As Russian, Argentinean, and Canadian farmers turned to wheat cultivation, increased competition in the world market affected the United States’ chief cash crop. Moreover, the worldwide deflation of prices for crops such as wheat and corn affected all who raised these crops for the international market, including American farmers.

The Character of American Agriculture

Technological innovation played a major role in facilitating American agricultural expansion. Harvesters, binders, and other new machines, pulled by work animals, diminished much of the drudgery of farming life, making the production of crops easier, more efficient, and cheaper. Moreover, they allowed
a farmer to cultivate far more land than was possible with hand tools. But machinery was expensive, and many American farmers borrowed to buy it. In the decade of the 1880s, mortgage indebtedness grew two and a half times as fast as agricultural wealth.

Only gradually did farmers realize the perils of their new situation in the world. Productivity rose 40 percent between 1869 and 1899. But the harvests for crops such as wheat were so large that the domestic market could not absorb them. Foreign competition and deflation further affected steadily declining prices. In 1867, corn sold for 78 cents a bushel; by 1889, it had tumbled to 23 cents. Wheat similarly plummeted from about $2 a bushel in 1867 to only 70 cents a bushel in 1889. Cotton profits also spiraled downward, the value of a bale depreciating from $43 in 1866 to $30 in the 1890s.

Falling prices did not automatically hurt all farmers. Because the supply of money rose more slowly than productivity, all prices declined—by more than half between the end of the Civil War and 1900 (for a discussion of the money issue, see Chapter 19). Farmers were receiving less for their crops but also paying less for their purchases. But deflation may have encouraged overproduction. To make the same amount of money, many farmers believed they had to raise larger and larger crops. As they did, prices fell even lower. Furthermore, deflation increased the real value of debts. In 1888, it took 174 bushels of wheat to pay the interest on a $2,000 mortgage at 8 percent. By 1895, it took 320 bushels. Falling prices thus affected most negatively farmers in newly settled areas who borrowed heavily to finance their new operations.

In 1893, the young American historian Frederick Jackson Turner addressed historians gathered at Chicago’s World’s Fair. Even though the hour was late, Turner’s remarks must have galvanized some of his listeners. The age of the American frontier had ended, Turner declared, pointing to recent census data that suggested the disappearance of vacant land in the West. Although Turner overstated his case (for even in the twentieth century much of the West remained uninhabited), his analysis did reflect the rapid expansion into the trans-Mississippi West after the Civil War. Between 1870 and
1900, acreage devoted to farming tripled west of the Mississippi, while from 1880 to 1900, the western population grew at a faster rate than that of the nation as a whole.

The Frontier Thesis in National and Global Context

Turner greeted the end of the frontier as a milestone in the nation’s history. The frontier had played a central role, he argued, in shaping the American character and American institutions. Over the course of American history, the struggle to tame the wilderness had changed settlers from Europeans into Americans and created a rugged individualism that “promoted democracy.” Turner’s thesis, emphasizing the unique nature of the American experience and linking it to the frontier, won many supporters. His interpretation complemented long-held ideas about the exceptional nature of American society and character. It accorded with what many saw as a long struggle to conquer what Turner called the “wilderness.”

But the American westward movement was less unusual than Turner suggested. The settlement of the trans-Mississippi West was part of a global pattern that redistributed European populations into new areas of the world. Paralleling their American counterparts, farmers, miners, and ranchers were claiming land in Argentina, Brazil, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and South Africa. Like Americans, they argued that native occupants had failed to make the land productive, and they used their technological superiority to wrest the land from those they considered backward and inferior. Around the world, many native peoples were facing domination by settler societies or retreating as far away from “civilization” as they could.

Turner’s frontier scheme gave the place of honor to the frontier farmer who transformed and civilized the wilderness. Before the Civil War, however, real farmers avoided settling many parts of the West. Few chose to try their luck on the Great Plains, an area from 200 to 700 miles wide, extending from Canada to Texas. Much of this region, especially beyond the ninety-eighth meridian, had little rain. The absence of trees seemed to symbolize the plains’ unsuitability for agriculture.

The Cattleman’s West, 1860–1890

While the region of the Great Plains initially discouraged farmers, its grasses provided the foundation for the cattle kingdom. Mining discoveries in California and the Rocky Mountains established a market for meat. When cattlemen discovered before the Civil
War that their animals could graze throughout the year on bunchgrass that accommodatingly turned into hay on its own, the future of the Great Plains for cattle raising became clear.

Although cattle raising dated back to Spanish mission days, the realization of the commercial possibilities for cattle ranching was partly a by-product of Union military strategy. During the war, the North had split the South, cutting Texas off from Confederate cattle markets. By the war’s end, millions of longhorns roamed the Texas range. The postwar burst of railroad construction provided a way of turning these cattle into dollars. If Texas ranchers drove their steers north to Abilene, Wichita, or Dodge City, they could be loaded on railroad cars for slaughtering and packinghouses in cities such as Chicago and Kansas City. In the cattle drives of the late 1860s and 1870s, cowboys herded thousands of longhorns north with hefty profits for owners and investors.

Ranchers on the Great Plains bought some of the cattle and bred them with Hereford and Angus cows to create cattle able to withstand the region’s severe winters. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, huge ranches appeared in eastern Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana and in western Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. These ventures, many owned by outside investors, paid off handsomely. Because the cattle could roam at will over the public domain, they cost owners little as they fattened up but commanded good prices at the time of sale. The cowboys (one-third of them Mexican and black) who herded the steers, however, shared few of the profits. Their meager wages of $25 to $40 a month were just enough to pay for a fling in the saloons, dance halls, and gambling palaces in Dodge City or Abilene when taking the cattle to market.

By the mid-1880s, the first phase of the cattle frontier was ending as farmers moved onto the plains, bought up public lands once used for grazing, and fenced them in. But the competition between cattle ranchers and farmers was only one factor in the cattle frontier’s collapse. Eager for profits, ranchers overstocked their herds in the mid-1880s. European investors added to the rush of capital into herding. Hungry cattle ate everything in sight, then weakened as grass became scarce. As was often the case on the plains, the weather played an important role. A winter of memorable blizzards followed the very hot summer of 1886. Cattle, usually able to forage for themselves during the winter months, could not dig through the deep snow to the grass and died from starvation. By spring, 90 percent of the cattle were dead. One observer reported seeing “countless carcasses of cattle . . . going down [a stream] with the ice, rolling over and over as they went, sometimes with all four stiffened legs pointing skyward. For days on end, tearing down with the grinding ice cakes, went Death’s cattle roundup.” Frantic owners dumped their surviving cattle on the market, getting $8 or even less per animal.

In the aftermath, the ranchers who remained stock raisers adopted new techniques. Experimenting with new breeds, they began to fence in their herds and to feed them grain during the winter. Since consumers were hungering for tender beef, these new methods suited the market. Ranching, like farming, was becoming a modern business.

Ranching altered the western landscape in ways that had immediate and future ecological consequences. As one Texan realized, “Grass is what counts. It's what saves us all—as far as we get saved. . . . Grass is what holds the earth together.” Seeing native species as either competing with cattle for nourishment or threatening them, ranchers hunted and killed antelope, elk, wolves, and other wildlife. When cattlemen overstocked the range, their herds devoured the perennial grasses. In their place, tough, less-nutritious annual grasses sprang up, and sometimes even these grasses disappeared. Lands once able to support large herds of cattle eventually were transformed into deserts of sagebrush, weeds, and dust.

Farmers on the Great Plains, 1865–1890s

Views of the agricultural possibilities of the Great Plains brightened after the Civil War, and railroads played a key role in transforming views of the region’s potential. Now that rail lines crossed the continent, they needed customers, settlers, and freight to make a profit. Along with town boosters and land speculators, also hoping to capitalize on their investments, railroads joined in extravagant promotional campaigns. “This is the sole remaining section of paradise in the western world,” promised one newspaper. “All the wild romances of the gorgeous orient dwindle into nothing when compared to the everyday realities of Dakota’s progress.” Propaganda reached beyond the United States to bring the message to Scandinavians, Germans, and others. Dismissing the fear that the plains lacked adequate rainfall to support cultivation, the promotional material assured readers that “All that is needed is to plow, plant, and attend to the crops properly; the rains are abundant.” Above-average rainfall in the 1880s strengthened the case.
In the first boom period of settlement, lasting from 1879 to the early 1890s, tens of thousands of eager families moved onto the Great Plains and began farming. The majority came from Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. But like the Ebbesens, a substantial number of settlers were immigrants, making the Great Plains the second most important destination for foreign immigration. The greatest numbers came from Germany, the British Isles, and Canada, joined by smaller groups of Scandinavians, Czechs, and Poles. Unlike the single immigrant men flocking to American cities for work, these newcomers came with their families. From the beginning, they intended to put down roots in the new country.

Some settlers established their farms by making claims under the provisions of the Homestead Act, which granted 160 acres to any family head or adult who lived on the claim for five years or who paid $1.25 an acre after six months of residence. Because homestead land was frequently less desirable than land held by railroads and speculators, however, most settlers bought land outright rather than taking up claims. The costs of getting started were thus more substantial than the Homestead Act would suggest. Western land was cheap compared with farmland in the East, but an individual farmer was fortunate if he could buy a good quarter section for under $500. The costs of machinery would often reach $700. Although some farmers thought it made better economic sense to lease rather than buy land, many rented only because they lacked the capital to purchase land and set up operations. In 1880, some 20 percent of the plains farmers were tenants, and this percentage rose over time.
Achieving success on a plains farm was much more difficult than promotional materials promised. Violent changes in the weather and temperature along with the scarcity of water and wood all demanded adjustments. Without firewood, farmers learned to burn corn cobs and twisted straw for warmth. The log cabin, long the symbol of frontier life, was replaced by houses of sod “bricks.” Although from a distance such houses often looked like mounds of earth—“homely old things,” as Hattie Leeper described them—they frequently had glass windows, wooden shingles, and even plastered interiors. Dark and gloomy to our eyes, they were comfortable, cozy, and practical for the settlers. Walls two to three feet thick kept out the scorching summer heat and fierce cold of winter, the moaning winds, and the prairie fires. The solidity of the sod house provided a welcome contrast to the impersonal power and scale of nature.

Late-nineteenth-century industrial innovations helped settlers overcome some of the natural obstacles. The shortage of timber for fencing and housing had encouraged early emigrants to go elsewhere. But in the 1870s, Joseph Glidden developed barbed wire as a cheap alternative to timber fencing. Having seen a simple wooden device designed to keep animals away from fences at a country fair, Glidden thought of making fencing wire with similar protruding barbs. Before long, he and a partner were producing hundreds of miles of barbed-wire fencing that could be used to enclose fields on the plains. Other innovations overcame other challenges. Twine binders, which speeded up grain harvesting, reduced the threat of losing crops to the unpredictable weather. And mail-order steel windmills for pumping water from deep underground wells relieved some of the water shortages by the 1890s.

Industrial innovations, however, could not resolve all of the problems confronting Great Plains settlers. Miriam Peckham, a Kansas homesteader, wrote:

I tell you Auntie no one can depend on farming for a living in this country. Henry is very industrious and this year had in over thirty acres of small grain, 8 acres of corn and about an acre of potatoes. We have sold our small grain . . . and it come to $100; now deduct $27.00 for cutting, $16.00 for threshing, $19.00 for hired help, say nothing of boarding our help, none of the trouble of drawing 25 miles to market and 25 cts on each head for ferriage over the river and where is your profit. I sometimes think this a God forsaken country, the [grass]hopper hurt our corn and we have 1/2 a crop and utterly destroyed our garden. If one wants trials, let them come to Kansas.

Peckham’s letter highlights the uncertainties of frontier life: the costs of machinery, the vagaries of...
crops and markets, the threat of pests and natural disasters, the shortage of cash. Unlike earlier emigrants to the Far West, who had to finance the six-month trip, many plains pioneers took up their homesteads with only a few dollars in their pockets. Survival often depended on how well families managed to do during the crucial first years and how much work each member of the family, including women and children, could perform. If they succeeded in raising and selling their crops, they might accumulate the capital needed to continue. But if nature was harsh or their luck or health bad, or if they were unable to adjust to new conditions or to do the hard labor that was necessary to get the farm going, the chances of failure grew.

Life on the plains had its compensations, however. Willa Cather, who grew up in Nebraska, showed both the harshness and the appeal of the prairie in her novels. Alexandra Bergson, the main character of *O Pioneers!* (1913), loves the land: “It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious.” The thousands of letters and diaries that survive from the period also provide a positive picture of farming life. One woman reflected on the way she had softened the harsh landscape. “Our flower garden was such a vision of beauty . . . the dreary, desolate place was blossoming in all the gorgeous beauty that God has promised to those who try.”

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the first boom on the Great Plains halted abruptly. Falling agricultural prices cut
profits. Then, the unusual rainfall that had lured farmers into the semiarid region near the 100th meridian vanished. A devastating drought followed. One farmer reported in 1890 that he had earned $41.48 from his wheat crop, yet his expenses for seed and threshing amounted to $56.00. The destitute survived on boiled weeds, a few potatoes, and a little bread and butter. Many farmers had debts they now could not repay. Thousands lost their farms to creditors. Some stayed on as tenants. Homesteaders like the Leepers gave up. By 1900, two-thirds of homesteaded farms had failed. Many homesteaders fled east. In western Kansas, the population declined by half between 1888 and 1892. The wagons of those who retreated bore the epitaph of their experience: “In God We Trusted: In Kansas We Busted.”

### The New Economy of the West, 1850–1893

This map shows the importance of mining, ranching, and farming in the western part of the nation. Note the railroad links with the East.
underground. Far from the plains, the pine forests around the Great Lakes fell to satisfy the settlers' need for wood and the railroads' voracious appetite for railroad ties.

**Cornucopia on the Pacific**

When gold was discovered in California, Americans rushed west to find it. But as one father told his eager son, "Plant your lands; these be your best gold fields." He was right; with the completion of a national railroad system, farming eventually became California's greatest asset. But farming in California resembled neither romanticized depictions of rural life nor the vision of the framers of the Homestead Act. The state's agricultural success would rest on railroads, machinery, and irrigation.

Although federal and state land policies supposedly promoted "homes for the homeless," little of California's land was actually homesteaded or developed as small family farms. When California entered the Union, Mexican ranchers had vast landholdings that never became part of the public domain. Because most Mexican Americans impoverished themselves in legal efforts to establish the legitimacy of their claims, speculators eventually acquired much of their land. Consequently, farmers needed substantial sums to buy land.

By 1871, reformer Henry George described California as "not a country of farms but a country of plantations and estates." California farms were indeed substantially larger than farms in the rest of the country. In 1870, the average California farm was 482 acres, whereas the average farm size nationwide was only 153 acres. By 1900, farms of 1,000 acres or more made up two-thirds of the state's farmland. This landscape reflected the advent of large-scale farming. As one California visitor reported to the *New York Times* in 1887, "You go through miles and miles of wheat fields, you see the fertility of the land and the beauty of the scenery, but where are the hundreds of farm houses . . . that you would see in Ohio or Iowa?"

Small farmers and ranchers did exist, of course, but they found it difficult to compete with large, mechanized operators using cheap migrant laborers, usually Mexican or Chinese. One wheat farm in the San Joaquin Valley was so vast that workers started plowing in the morning at one end of the 17-mile field, ate lunch at its halfway point, and camped at its end that night.

The value of much of California's agricultural land, especially the southern half of the Central Valley, depended on water. By the 1870s, water, land, and railroad companies, using the labor and expertise of Chinese workers, were taking on the huge costs of building dams, headgates, and canals. They passed on the costs of construction to settlers now eager to acquire hitherto barren lands along with water rights. By 1890, more than a quarter of California's farms benefited from irrigation. The irrigation ditches were a fitting symbol of the importance of technology and a managerial attitude toward the land that characterized late-nineteenth-century agriculture, particularly in California.

Although grain was initially California's most valuable crop, it faced stiff competition from farmers on the plains and in other parts of the world. Some argued that land capable of raising luscious

### Agricultural Productivity, 1800–1900

The astonishing gains in the productivity of wheat farmers point to the use of reapers that cut and bind the wheat and threshers that knocked the grain off the stalks. The combine integrated both operations and also cleared and bagged the grain.

<table>
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<th>Crop and Productivity Indicator</th>
<th>1800</th>
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<th>1880</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wheat</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Worker-hours/acre</td>
<td>56</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>233</td>
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<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worker-hours/acre</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>Worker-hours/bale</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>439</td>
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</table>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.
fruits “in a climate surpassing that of Italy, is too valuable for the cultivation of simple cereals.” But high railroad rates and lack of refrigeration limited the volume of fresh fruit and vegetables sent to market. As railroad managers in the 1880s realized the potential profitability of California produce, they lowered rates and introduced refrigerated railroad cars. In June 1888, fresh apricots and cherries successfully survived the trip from California to New York. Fruit and vegetable production rose, benefiting from the agricultural expertise of Chinese laborers, tenant farmers, and Chinese entrepreneurs. So important were their contributions that some have argued that Chinese know-how was mainly responsible for the shift to produce farming. By 1890, about 9,000 carloads of navel oranges were heading east. Before long, California fruit appeared in London markets and on English dining tables.

The Mining West

Mining hastened rapid western growth and development. The first and best-known mining rush occurred in 1848 when gold was discovered in California, but others followed as precious metals—silver, iron, copper, coal, lead, zinc, and tin—lured thousands west to Colorado, Montana, Idaho, and Nevada as well as to states such as Minnesota. Mining discoveries were transformative events, for they attracted people and businesses west, often to places far away from agricultural settlements. Hastily built mining communities might be eyesores, but they had bustling urban characters. If and when the strike was over, however, residents abandoned the mining camps and towns as fast as they had rushed into them. The pattern of boom and bust characterized much of mining life.

While the image of the independent miner panning for gold has passed into the nation’s memory, the reality of late-nineteenth-century mining was nothing like the popular stereotype. Retrieving minerals from rock was difficult, expensive, and dangerous. A successful mine required a large labor force, industrial tools, and railroad links. Miners worked way below the earth’s surface in poorly ventilated tunnels, with no means for removing human or animal waste. Temperatures could reach as high as 120 degrees. Accidents were part of the job, which depended on blasting equipment and industrial machinery. In 1884, a Montana miner drilled into an unexploded dynamite charge and lost his eyes and ear. He received no compensation, for the court decided that the accident “was the result of an unforeseen and unavoidable accident incident to the risk of mining.”
As the next chapter will show, in time, western miners became one of the most radical groups of industrial workers.

Exploiting Natural Resources

Mining was a big business with high costs and a basic dynamic that encouraged rapid and thorough exploitation of the earth’s resources. The decimation of the nation’s forests went hand in hand with large-scale mining and the railroads that provided the links to markets. Both railroads and mining depended on wood—railroads for wooden ties, mines for shaft timber and ore reduction. The impact of these demands is captured by the California State Board of Agriculture’s estimate in the late 1860s that one-third of the state’s forests had already disappeared.

When lumber companies cut down timber, they affected the flow of streams and destroyed the habitat supporting birds and animals. Like the activities of farmers and cattle owners, the companies that stripped the earth of its forest cover were also contributing to soil erosion. The idea that the public lands belonging to the federal government ought to be rapidly developed supported such exploitation of the nation’s natural resources. Often, in return for royalties, the government leased parts of the public domain to companies that hoped to extract valuable minerals, not to own the land permanently. In other cases, companies bought land, but not always legally. In 1878, Congress passed the Timber and Stone Act, which initially applied to Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and California. This legislation allowed the sale of 160-acre parcels of the public domain that were “unfit for cultivation” and “valuable chiefly for timber.” Timber companies were quick to see the possibilities in the new law. They hired men willing to register for claims and then to turn them over to timber interests.
By the end of the century, more than 3.5 million acres of the public domain had been acquired under the legislation, and most of it was in corporate hands. The rapacious and rapid exploitation of resources combined with the increasing pace of industrialization made some Americans uneasy. Many believed that forests played a part in causing rainfall and that their destruction would have an adverse impact on the climate. Others, such as John Muir, lamented the destruction of the country’s great natural beauty. In 1868, Muir came upon the Great Valley of California, “all one sheet of plant gold, hazy and vanishing in the distance . . . one smooth, continuous bed of honey-bloom.” He soon realized, however, that a “wild, restless agriculture” and “flocks of hoofed locusts, sweeping over the ground like a fire” would destroy this vision of loveliness. Muir became a preservation champion. He played a part in the creation of Yosemite National Park in 1890, participated in a successful effort to allow President Benjamin Harrison to classify certain parts of the public domain as forest reserves (the Forest Reserve Act of 1891), and in 1892 established the Sierra Club. At the same time, conservation ideas were also emerging. Gifford Pinchot, who became a leading advocate of these ideas, was less interested in the preservation of the nation’s wilderness areas than in careful management of its natural resources. “Conservation,” he explained, “means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of man.” Both perspectives, however, were more popular in the East than in the West, where the seeming abundance of natural resources and the profit motive diminished support.
RESOLVING THE NATIVE AMERICAN QUESTION

Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux, listened to a story his father had heard from his father.

A long time ago . . . there was once a Lakota [Sioux] holy man, called Drinks Water, who dreamed what was...
to be; and this was long before the coming of the
Wasichus [white men]. He dreamed . . . that a strange
race had woven a spider’s web all around the Lakotas.
And he said: “When this happens, you shall live in
square gray houses, in a barren land, and beside those
square gray houses you shall starve.”

Black Elk saw this strange dream come true.
As farmers settled the western frontier and be-
came entangled in a national economy, they
clashed with the Native American tribes who lived
on the land. In California, disease and violence
killed 90 percent of the Native American population
in the 30 years following the gold rush. Elsewhere,
the struggle among Native Americans, white set-
tlers, the U.S. Army, and government officials and
reformers was prolonged and bitter. Although some
tribes moved onto government reservations with lit-
tle protest, most tribes, including the Nez Percé in
the Northwest, the Apache in the Southwest, and
the Plains Indians, resisted the attempts to curb
their way of life and to transform their culture.

Background to the Plains Wars
The lives of most Plains Indians revolved around the
buffalo. Increased emigration to California and Ore-
gon in the 1840s and 1850s disrupted
tribal pursuits and animal migration pat-
terns. Initially, the federal government
tried, without much success, to persuade
the Plains tribes to stay away from white
wagon trains and white settlers. As Lone
Horn, a Miniconjou chief, explained
when American commissioners at the
1851 Fort Laramie Council asked him whether he
would be satisfied to live on the Missouri River,
“When the buffalo comes close to the river, we come
close to it. When the buffaloes go off, we go off after
them.”

During the Civil War, the eastern tribes that were
forced to relocate in Oklahoma divided: some
tribes, especially the slaveholders, supported the
Confederacy, while other tribes supported the
Union. After the war, however, all were branded as
“traitors.” The federal government callously nulli-
fied earlier pledges and treaties, leaving Native
Americans defenseless against further incursions
on their lands. As settlers pushed into Kansas, the
tribes living in Kansas were shunted into Oklahoma.

The White Perspective
When the Civil War ended, red and white people on
the Great Plains were already at war. In 1864, the
Colorado militia massacred a band of
friendly Cheyenne at Sand Creek.
Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho soon re-
sponded in kind. The Great Plains wars
had begun.
Although not all whites condoned this
butchery, the congressional commission
authorized to make peace viewed Native
Americans’ future narrowly. The commis-
sioners, including the commander of the army in
the West, Civil War hero William T. Sherman, ac-
cepted as fact that the West belonged to an “indus-
trious, thrifty, and enlightened population” of
whites. Native Americans, the commission believed,
must relocate to western South Dakota or Okla-
homa to learn white ways. Annuities, food, and
clothes would ease their transition to “civilized” life.
At two major conferences in 1867 and 1868, chiefs
listened to these drastic proposals spelling the end of
traditional native life. Some agreed; others, like one
Kiowa chief, insisted, “I don’t want to settle. I love to
roam over the prairies.” In any case, the agreements
were not binding because no chief had authority to
speak for his tribe. For its part, the U.S. Senate
dragged its feet in approving the treaties. Supplies
promised to Indians who settled in the arid reserved
areas failed to materialize, and wildlife proved too
sparse to support them. These tribes soon drifted
back to their former hunting grounds.
Sherman warned, “All who cling to their old hunt-
ing ground are hostile and will remain so till killed
off.” When persuasion failed, the U.S. Army went to
war. “The more we can kill this year,” Sherman re-
marked, “the less will have to be killed the next war.”
In 1867, he ordered General Philip Sheridan to deal
with the tribes. Sheridan introduced winter cam-
paigning, aimed at seeking out Indians who divided
Weekly and monthly magazines constitute a rich primary source for the historian, offering a vivid picture of the issues of the day and useful insights into popular tastes and values. With advances in the publishing industry and an increasingly literate population, the number of these journals soared in the years following the Civil War. In 1865, only 700 periodicals were published. Twenty years later, there were 3,300. As the National Magazine grumbled, “Magazines, magazines, magazines! The newsstands are already groaning under the heavy load, and there are still more coming.”

Some of these magazines were aimed at the mass market. Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, established in 1855, was one of the most successful. At its height, circulation reached 100,000. Making skillful use of pictures (sometimes as large as two by three feet and folded into the magazine), the weekly covered important news of the day as well as music, drama, sports, and books. Although Leslie relied more heavily on graphics and sensationalism than do modern news weeklies, his publication was a forerunner of Newsweek and Time.

Another kind of weekly magazine was aimed primarily at middle- and upper-class readers. Editors such as the oft-quoted Edwin Lawrence Godkin of The Nation, with a circulation of about 30,000, hoped to influence those in positions of authority and power by providing a forum for the discussion of reform issues. In contrast, Scribner’s revealed a more conservative, middle-of-the-road point of view. Both magazines, however, exuded a confident, progressive tone that was characteristic of middle-class Americans.

Harper’s Weekly was one of the most important magazines designed primarily for middle- and upper-class readers. Established in 1857, this publication continued in print until 1916. The success of Harper’s Weekly, which called itself a “family newspaper,” rested on a combination of its moderate point of view and an exciting use of illustrations and cartoons touching on contemporary events. The popular cartoons of Thomas Nast appeared in this magazine. In large part because of the use of graphics, the circulation of Harper’s Weekly reached a peak of 160,000 in 1872.

Illustrated here is a page from the January 16, 1869, issue of Harper’s Weekly. The layout immediately suggests the importance of graphics. Most of the page is taken up with the three pictures. The top and bottom pictures are wood engravings based on drawings by Theodore R. Davis, one of Harper’s best-known illustrator-reporters. The center picture was derived from a photograph.

The story featured on this page concerns a victory of General George Custer in the war against the Cheyenne tribe that the U.S. Army was waging that winter. Davis had been a correspondent in the West covering Custer’s actions in 1867. But when news of Custer’s victory arrived, Davis was back in New York. He thus drew on his imagination for the two scenes reproduced on the next page. What kind of characterization of Native Americans does Davis give in the picture at the top of the page? What view of American soldiers does he suggest? At the bottom of the page, you can see soldiers slaughtering “worthless” horses while Cheyenne teepees burn in the background. Would the average viewer have any sympathy for the plight of the Cheyenne after looking at this picture? This “victory,” in fact, involved the slaughter not only of horses but also of all males over age 8.

The editors’ decision to insert a picture that had nothing to do with the incident being reported was obviously significant. As you can see, the subject in the center illustration is a white hunter who had been killed and scalped by Indians. By considering the choice of graphics and text, you can begin to discover how magazines provide insight, not only into the events of the day but also into the ways magazines shaped the values and perspectives of nineteenth-century men and women.

Reflecting on the Past

What kind of special relationship were the editors suggesting by placing the picture of one dead white hunter in the center of a page that primarily covered a specific conflict between the Indians and the U.S. Army? How might the reader respond to the group of pictures as a whole? How do you? How does the text contribute to the overall view of the Indian–white relationship that the pictures suggest?
Harper's Weekly delivered powerful messages about the Native Americans in its choice of illustrations.
into small groups during the winter and exterminating them.

Completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 added yet another pressure for “solving” the Indian question. Transcontinental railroads wanted rights-of-way through tribal lands and needed white settlers to make their operations profitable. Few whites considered Native Americans to have any right to lands they wanted.

In his 1872 annual report, the commissioner for Indian affairs, Francis Amasa Walker, addressed two fundamental questions: how to prevent Indians from blocking white migration to the Great Plains, and what to do with them over the long run. Walker suggested buying off the “savages” with promises of food and gifts, luring them onto reservations, and there imposing a “rigid reformatory discipline,” necessary because Indians were “unused to manual labor.” Though Walker wanted to save the Indians from destruction, he offered only one grim choice: “yield or perish.”

The Tribal View

Native Americans defied such attacks on their ancient way of life and protested the wholesale violation of treaties. Black Elk remembered that, in 1863, when he was only three, his father had his leg broken in a fierce battle against the white men. “When I was older,” he recalled,

I learned what the fighting was about. . . . Up on the Madison Fork the Wasichus had found much of the yellow metal that they worship and that makes them crazy, and they wanted to have a road up through our country to the place where the yellow metal was; but my people did not want the road. It would scare the bison and make them go away, and also it would let the other Wasichus come in like a river. They told us that they wanted only to use a little land, as much as a wagon would take between the wheels; but our people knew better.

Black Elk’s father and many others soon realized that fighting was the only “way to keep our country.” But “wherever we went, the soldiers came to kill us.”

Broken promises fired Indian resistance. In 1875, the federal government allowed gold prospectors into the Black Hills, part of the Sioux reservation and one of their sacred places. Chiefs Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Rain-in-the-Face led the angry Sioux on the warpath. At the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876, they vanquished General George Custer. But their bravery and skill could not permanently withstand the power of the well-supplied, well-armed, and determined U.S. Army. Elsewhere, the pattern of resistance and ultimate defeat was repeated. In Texas,

In what ways does this journal entry suggest the varying opinions of whites about Native Americans?

Sister Blandina Segale, a member of the Cincinnati Sisters of Charity, had hoped to work in the West from the time she joined the Catholic order of nuns. In 1872, she was ordered to Colorado. After spending four years there, she went on to do mission work in New Mexico. The following excerpt is from her diary, which she kept for more than 20 years. The date on this entry is November 1882.

When I boarded the Lamy branch to the ancient city, I noticed a number of Pino Indians. Scarcely was I seated when a blanket ed chief came to ask me in incorrect Spanish:

“Tu vas Carlisle, Santa Catalina escuela?” (Are you going to Carlisle, to Saint Catherine’s School?)

“No Santa Catalina School in Carlisle.”

“No Santa Catalina School, no papooses!”

With this the Indian agent, Thomas by name came to ask me if the atmosphere were too oppressive, meaning the nearness of the Indian to me. I retorted, “The oppression just now comes from another quarter.” . . .

That English phrase, “The survival of the fittest,” is being applied to the rightful owners of this country. Let us stretch our imagination and see ten million suddenly descend on us! Would we not, if given a new chance, be more considerate with the Indians? The money supplied by our government and misapplied by the agents helps the extermination.
General Sherman vanquished Native American tribes, and in the Pacific Northwest, Nez Percé Chief Joseph surrendered in 1877.

The wholesale destruction of the buffalo was an important element in white victory. The animals were central to Native American life, culture, and religion. As one Pawnee chief explained, “Am afraid when we have no meat to offer, Great Spirit ... will be angry & punish us.” Although Plains Indians could be wasteful of buffalo in areas where the animals were abundant, white miners and hunters ultimately destroyed the herds. Sportsmen shot the beasts from train windows. Railroad crews ate the meat. Ranchers’ cattle competed for grass. And demand for buffalo bones for fertilizer and hides for robes and shoes encouraged the decimation.

The slaughter, which had claimed 13 million animals by 1883, was disgraceful in retrospect. The Indians considered white men demented. “They just killed and killed because they like to do that,” said one, whereas when “we hunted the bison ... [we] killed only what we needed.” But the destruction of the herds pleased whites who were determined to curb the movements of Native Americans. As Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano explained in 1872, “I cannot regard the rapid disappearance of the game from its former haunts as a matter prejudicial to our management of the Indians.” Rather, he said, “as they become convinced that they can no longer rely upon the supply of game for their support, they will return to the more reliable source of subsistence furnished at their agencies.”

The 1887 Dawes Act

Changing federal policy was aimed at ending Native American power and culture. In 1871, Congress abandoned the practice, in effect since the 1790s, of treating the tribes as sovereign nations. Other measures supplemented this attempt to undermine both tribal integrity and the prestige of tribal leaders, whom negotiators would no longer recognize as speaking for their tribes. The government urged tribes to replace tribal justice with a court system and extended federal jurisdiction to the reservations. Tribes were also warned not to gather for religious ceremonies.

The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 pulled together the strands of federal Indian policy that emerged after the Civil War and set its course for the rest of the century. Believing that tribal bonds kept Indians in savagery, reformers intended to destroy them. As Theodore Roosevelt noted approvingly, the bill was a “mightily pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass.” The reservation policy was, in effect, abandoned. Rather than allotting reservation lands to tribal groups, the act allowed the president to distribute these lands to individuals. Private property, the framers of the bill reasoned, would undermine communal norms and tribal identity and encourage tribes to settle down and farm as white men did. Although Indian agents explained that Native Americans opposed the Dawes Act, Congress, convinced that white people knew what was best for Indians, did not hesitate to legislate on their behalf.

The fact that speculators as well as reformers lobbied for
the legislation betrayed another motive at work. Even if each Indian family head claimed a typical share of 160 acres, millions of “surplus” acres would remain for sale to white settlers. Within 20 years of the Dawes Act, Native Americans had lost 60 percent of their lands. The federal government held the profits from land sales “in trust” and used them for the “civilizing” mission.

The Ghost Dance: An Indian Renewal Ritual

By the 1890s, the grim reality of their plight made many Native Americans responsive to a new religious revitalization movement. Like other prophets before him, the Paiute holy man, Wovoka, held out hope that history would reverse itself. He assured his followers that a natural disaster would eliminate the white race and that their ancestors and wild game would return to earth. If Indians performed a special dance called the Ghost Dance and observed traditional customs, this transformation would come more quickly. Wovoka’s prophecies spread rapidly. Believers expressed their faith and hope through the new rituals of ghost or spirit dancing, hypnosis, and meditation.

Although Wovoka’s prophecies discouraged hostile actions against whites, American settlers were uneasy. Indian agents tried to prevent the ghost dances and filed hysterical reports. “Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. . . . We need protection, and we need it now.” One agent identified the Sioux medicine man Sitting Bull, who had strenuously opposed American expansion, as a leading troublemaker and decided to arrest him. In the confusion of arrest, Indian police killed Sitting Bull. Bands of Sioux fled the reservation with the army in swift pursuit. In late December 1890, the army overtook the Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek. Although the Sioux had raised a flag of truce, a scuffle that ensued as they were turning over their weapons led to a bloody massacre. Using the most up-to-date machine guns and Hotchkiss cannons, the army killed more than 200 men, women, and children. An eyewitness described the desolate scene a few days later. “Among the fragments of burned tents . . . we saw the frozen bodies lying close together or piled one upon another.”

Thus arose the lament of Black Elk, who saw his people diminished, starving, despairing:

Once we were happy in our own country and we were seldom hungry, for then the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives, and there was plenty for them and for us. But then the Wasichus came, and they have made little islands for us . . . , and always these islands are becoming smaller, for around them surges the gnawing flood of the Wasichus; . . . dirty with lies and greed.
As Black Elk recognized, white Americans had finally defeated the western tribes. Once independent, proud, and strong, Native Americans suffered dependency, poverty, and social and cultural disorganization on the reservations, in grim Indian schools, and in city slums. The country’s original inhabitants seemed to have no place in the American nation.
THE NEW SOUTH

The trans-Mississippi West was transformed as native peoples were subdued, the Great Plains were settled, and commercial agriculture helped knit the region into the larger world. Mining camps turned into industrial centers. Western cities grew at a fast pace; by 1900, nearly 40 percent of westerners lived in cities. The large number of itinerant workers who worked in mines, forests, and fields provided a flexible workforce that supported economic growth.

In contrast to this pattern, the southern economy sputtered. Of all the nation’s agricultural regions, the South was the poorest. In 1880, southerners’ yearly earnings were only half the national average. The agricultural labor force was neither efficient, nor mobile, nor prosperous enough to invest in needed improvements. And while some southerners dreamed of making the agricultural South rival the industrial North, their dreams were never realized. The region remained dependent on the North. Southern industrial workers were poorly paid, caught in dead-end jobs with little hope of advancement.
Postwar Southerners Face the Future

After the painful war and Reconstruction, compelling arguments for regional self-sufficiency rang out. Those who wanted a “New South” argued that southern backwardness did not stem from the war itself, but from basic conditions in southern life—a rural economy based on cotton foremost among them. The defeat only made clearer the reality of the nineteenth century. Power and wealth came not from cotton but from factories, machines, and cities.

The effort to create a New South was far-ranging. In hundreds of speeches, editorials, pamphlets, articles, and books, spokesmen for the New South, such as Atlanta newspaper publisher Henry Grady, encouraged fellow southerners to change—to abandon pre-war ideals that glorified leisure and gentility and adopt new entrepreneurial values. To lure northern investment, critical because the South was short of capital, New South advocates also held out the possibility of “fabulous” profits. In a bid to encourage manufacturers, several southern state governments offered tax exemptions and the cheap labor of leased convicts. Texas and Florida awarded the railroads land grants, and cities such as Atlanta and Louisville mounted huge industrial exhibitions. The most startling example of commitment to the vision of a New South may have come in 1886 when southern railroad companies, in a crash effort, relaid railroad tracks and adjusted rolling stock to fit the northern gauges.

During the late nineteenth century, northern money flowed south as dollars replaced the moral fervor and political involvement of the Civil War and Reconstruction years. In the 1880s, northerners increased their investment in the cotton industry sevenfold and financed the expansion of the southern railroad system. Northern capital fueled southern urban expansion. By 1900, some 15 percent of all southerners lived in cities, whereas only 7 percent had in 1860. (The national averages for these years were 40 and 20 percent, respectively.)

Birmingham, Alabama, symbolized the New South. In 1870, the site was a peaceful cornfield. The next year, two northern real estate speculators arrived on the scene, attracted by the area’s rich iron deposits. Despite a siege of cholera and the depression of the 1870s, Birmingham rapidly became the center of the southern iron and steel industry. By 1890, a total of 38,414 people lived in the city. Coke ovens, blast furnaces, rolling mills, iron foundries, and machine shops belched forth polluting smoke into the air where once there had been only fields. Millions of dollars’ worth of finished goods poured forth from the city’s mills and factories, and eight railroad lines carried them away.

Other southern cities flourished as well. Memphis prospered from its lumber industry and the manufacturing of cottonseed products, and Richmond became the country’s tobacco capital even as its flour mills and iron and steel foundries continued to produce wealth. Augusta, Georgia, was the “Lowell of the South,” a leader in the emerging textile industry that blossomed in Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Alabama. Augusta’s eight cotton mills employed about 2,800 workers, many of them women and children.

The Other Side of Progress

New South leaders—a small group of merchants, industrialists, and planters—bragged about the growth of the iron and textile industries and paraded statistics to prove the success of efforts to modernize. The South, one writer boasted, was “throbbing with industrial and railroad activity.” Middle-class southerners increasingly accepted new entrepreneurial values. But the South made slow progress.

Older values persisted. Indeed, New South spokesmen paradoxically kept older, chivalric values alive by romanticizing the recent past. By viewing “all Confederate veterans” rather than big businessmen as “heroes” and by clinging to genteel values that did not glorify getting ahead, many southerners resisted the demands of the new economic order. Despite the interest in modernization, southerners did not invest in a modern workforce. The southern school system lagged far behind that of the North.

Although new industries and signs of progress abounded, two of the new industries depended on tobacco and cotton—traditional crops long at the center of rural life. As they had before the war, commerce and government work drove urban growth. Moreover, the South did not better its position relative to the North. Whereas in 1860, the South had 17 percent of the country’s manufacturing concerns, by 1904, it had only 15 percent. The South’s achievements were not insignificant during a period in which northern industry and cities rapidly expanded, but they could not make the South the equal of the North.

Moreover, the South failed to reap many benefits from industrialization. As in the antebellum period, the South remained an economic vassal of the North. Southern businessmen grew in number, but with the exception of the American Tobacco Company, no great southern corporations arose. Instead, southerners worked for northern companies and corporations, which absorbed southern businesses
or dominated them financially. Profits flowed north. "Our capitalists are going into your country," the Lowell Manufacturers' Record noted, "because they see a chance to make money there, but you must not think that they will give your people the benefit of the money they make. That will come North and enrich their heirs, or set up public libraries in our country towns." As dollars fled north, so, too, went the power to make critical decisions. In many cases, northern directors determined that southern mills and factories could handle only the early stages of processing, while northern factories finished the goods. Thus, southern cotton mills sent yarn and coarse cloth north for completion. Southern manufacturers who did finish their products, hoping to compete in the marketplace, found that railroad rate discrimination robbed their goods of any competitive edge.

Individual workers in the new industries may have found factory life preferable to sharecropping, but their rewards were meager. Caught in low-skill jobs with little chance for advancement, workers earned lower wages and worked longer hours in the South than elsewhere. Per capita income was the same in 1900 as it had been in 1860—and only half the national average. In North Carolina in the 1890s, workers were paid an average of 50 cents a day and toiled 70 hours a week. Black workers, who made up 6 percent of the southern manufacturing force in 1890 (but were excluded from textile mills), usually had the worst jobs and the lowest pay.

The thousands of women and children who labored gave silent testimony to the fact that their husbands and fathers could not earn enough to support their families. As usual, women and children earned lower wages than men. Justifying these policies, one Augusta factory president claimed that the employment of children was "a matter of charity with us; some of them would starve if they were not given employment. . . . Ours are not overworked. The work we give children is very light." Actually, many children at his factory were doing the same work as adults, but for children’s pay.

The South Carolina Cotton Fields

What evidence does this photograph, taken in the 1870s, provide for understanding the character of black life after the Civil War and the limitations of the New South’s effort to transform southern life? (Photography Collection, Robert N. Dennis Collection of Stereoscopic Views, The New York Public Library/Art Resource, NY)

Cotton Still King

Although New South advocates envisioned the South’s transformation from a rural to an industrial society, they always recognized the need for agricultural change. "It's time for an agricultural revolution," proclaimed Henry Grady, the New South’s most vocal spokesman. Overdependence on “King Cotton” hobbled southern agriculture by making farmers the victims of faraway market forces and an oppressive credit system. Subdivide old cotton plantations into small diversified farms, Grady urged. Raising choice produce for urban markets could result in "simply wonderful profits."

A new agricultural South with new class and economic arrangements did emerge, but not the one Grady envisioned. Despite the breakup of some plantations, large landowners were resourceful in keeping their property and dealing with postwar conditions, as Chapter 16 showed. As they adopted new agricultural arrangements, former slaves sank into peonage.

White farmers on small and medium-size holdings fared only slightly better than black tenants and sharecroppers. Immediately after the war, high cotton prices tempted them to raise as much cotton as they could. Then prices began a disastrous decline, from 11 cents a pound in 1875 to less than 5 cents in 1894. Yeoman farmers became entangled in debt. Each year, farmers bought supplies on credit from merchants so they could plant the next year’s crop and support their families until harvest. In return, merchants demanded their exclusive business and acquired a lien (claim) on their crops. But when farmers sold their crops at declining prices, they usually discovered that they had not earned enough to settle with the merchant, who had charged dearly
for store goods and whose annual interest rates might exceed 100 percent. Each year, thousands of farmers fell further behind. By 1900, more than half of the South’s white farmers and three-quarters of its black farmers were tenants. Tenancy increased all over rural America, but nowhere faster than in the Deep South.

These patterns had baneful results for individual southerners and for the South as a whole. Caught in a cycle of debt and poverty, few farmers could think of improving techniques or diversifying crops. Desperate to pay debts, they concentrated on cotton despite falling prices. Landowners pressured tenants to raise a market crop. Far from diversifying, farmers increasingly limited their crops. By 1880, the South was not growing enough food to feed its people adequately. Poor nutrition contributed to chronic bad health.

The Nadir of Black Life

Grady and other New South advocates painted a picture of a strong, prosperous, and industrialized South, a region that could deal with the troublesome race issue without interference. Grady had few regrets over the end of slavery, which he thought had contributed to southern economic backwardness. Realizing that black labor would be crucial to the transformation he sought, he advocated racial cooperation. But racial cooperation did not mean equality. Grady assumed that blacks were racially inferior and supported an informal system of segregation. “The negro is entitled to his freedom, his franchise, to full and equal legal rights,” Grady wrote in 1883. But “social equality he can never have.”

By the time of Grady’s death in 1889, a much harsher perspective on southern race relations was replacing his view. In 1891, at a national assembly of women’s clubs in Washington, D.C., Frances Watkins Harper, a black speaker, writer, and former abolitionist, anticipated efforts to strip the vote from blacks and appealed to the white women at the meeting not to abandon black suffrage. “I deem it a privilege to present the negro,” she said, “not as a mere dependent asking for Northern sympathy or Southern compassion, but as a member of the body politic who has a claim upon the nation for justice, simple justice.” Women, of all people, should not seek to achieve their own right to vote at the expense of the vote for black men, she explained. “Instead of taking the ballot from his hands, teach him how to use it, and add his quota to the progress, strength, and durability of the nation.”

The decision by congressional leaders in 1890 to shelve a proposed act for protecting black civil rights and the defeat of the Blair bill providing federal assistance for educational institutions left black Americans vulnerable, as Harper realized. The traditional sponsor of the rights of freedpeople, the Republican party, left blacks to fend for themselves as a minority in the white South. The courts also abandoned blacks. In 1878, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a Louisiana statute banning discrimination in transportation. In 1882, the Court voided the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, which had been passed to break the power of the Klan. In 1883, the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which assured blacks of equal rights in public places, were declared unconstitutional on the grounds that the federal government did not have the right to involve itself in racial relations between individuals.

Northern leaders did not oppose these actions. In fact, northerners increasingly promulgated negative stereotypes in magazines, newspapers, cartoons, advertisements, “coon songs,” serious art and theater, and the minstrel shows that dominated northern entertainment. The Atlantic Monthly in 1890 anticipated a strong current in magazine literature when it expressed doubts that this “lowly variety of man” could ever be brought up to the intellectual and moral standards of whites. Other magazines openly opposed suffrage as wasted on people too “ignorant, weak, lazy and incompetent” to make good use of it. Forum magazine suggested that “American Negroes” had “too much liberty.” When this freedom was combined with natural “race traits” of stealing and hankering after white women, the Forum advised in 1893, black crime increased. Only lynching and burning would deter the “barbarous” rapist and other “sadly degenerated” Negroes corrupted since the Civil War by independence and too much education.

Encouraged by northern public opinion, and with the blessing of Congress and the Supreme Court, southern citizens and legislatures sought to make blacks permanently second-class members of southern society. In the political sphere, white southerners amended state constitutions to disfranchise black voters. By various legal devices—the poll tax, literacy tests, “good character” and “understanding” clauses administered by white voter registrars, and all-white primary elections—blacks lost the right to vote. The most ingenious method was the “grandfather clause,” which specified that only citizens whose grandfathers were registered to vote on January 1, 1867, could cast their ballots. This virtually excluded blacks. Although the Supreme Court outlawed blatantly discriminatory laws such as grandfather clauses, a series of other constitutional changes such as those just mentioned, beginning in
Mississippi in 1890 and spreading to all 11 former Confederate states by 1910, effectively excluded the black vote. The results were dramatic. Louisiana, for example, contained 130,334 registered black voters in 1896. Eight years later, there were only 1,342.

In a second tactic in the 1890s, state and local laws legalized informal segregation in public facilities. Beginning with railroads and schools, “Jim Crow” laws were extended to libraries, restaurants, hospitals, prisons, parks and playgrounds, cemeteries, toilets, drinking fountains, and nearly every other place where blacks and whites might mingle. The Supreme Court upheld these laws in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* by declaring that “separate but equal” facilities did not violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment because separation did not necessarily mean the inferiority of a group. The Court’s decision opened the way for as many forms of legal segregation as southern lawmakers could devise.

Political and social discrimination made it ever more possible to keep blacks permanently confined to agricultural and unskilled labor. While extended families—aunts, uncles, cousins, and other kin—all helped blacks cope with their dire situation, the truth was that all too often blacks depended on whites for their material welfare. In 1900, nearly 84 percent of black workers nationwide engaged in some form of agricultural labor as farmhands, overseers, sharecroppers, or tenant or independent farmers or in service jobs, primarily domestic service and laundry work. These had been the primary slave occupations. The remaining 16 percent worked in forests, sawmills, mines, and, with northward migration, northern cities.

Gone were the skilled black tradesmen of slavery days. At the end of the Civil War, at least half of all skilled artisans in the South had been black. But by the 1890s, the percentage had decreased to less than 10 percent, as whites systematically excluded blacks from the trades. The factory work that blacks had been doing was also reduced, largely to drive a wedge between poor blacks and whites in order to prevent unionization. In Greensboro, North Carolina, for example, where in 1870 some 30 percent of all blacks worked in skilled trades or factory occupations, by 1910, blacks in the skilled trades had been reduced to 8 percent, and not a single black worked in a Greensboro factory. The exclusion of blacks from industry prevented them from acquiring the skills and habits that would enable them to rise into the middle class as would many European immigrants and their children by the mid-twentieth century.

Blacks did not accept their declining position passively. In the mid-1880s, they enthusiastically joined the mass worker organization the Knights of Labor (discussed in Chapter 18), first in cities such as Richmond and Atlanta and then in rural areas. But southern whites feared that the Knights’ policies of racial and economic cooperation might lead to social equality. The Charleston *News and Courier* warned of the dangers of “miscegenation” and the possibility that the South would be left “in the possession of . . . mongrels and hybrids.” As blacks continued to join it, whites abandoned the order in growing numbers. The flight of whites weakened the organization in the South, and a backlash of white violence finally smashed it.

Against this backdrop, incidents of lynchings and other forms of violence against blacks increased. Lynching was a way to show both black men and white women the dire consequences of stepping out of line. On February 21, 1891, the *New York Times* reported that in Texarkana, Arkansas, a
mob apprehended Ed Coy, a 32-year-old black man who was charged with the rape of a white woman. He was tied to a stake and then burned alive. As Coy proclaimed his innocence to a large crowd, his alleged victim somewhat hesitatingly put the torch to his oil-soaked body. The Times report concluded that only by the “terrible death such as fire . . . can inflict” could other blacks “be deterred from the commission of like crimes.” Ed Coy was one of more than 1,400 black men lynched or burned alive during the 1890s. About one-third were charged with sex crimes. The rest were accused of a variety of “crimes” related to not knowing their place; this included marrying or insulting a white woman, testifying in court against whites, or having a “bad reputation.”

Diverging Black Responses

White discrimination and exploitation nourished new protest tactics and ideologies among blacks. For years, Frederick Douglass had been proclaiming that blacks should remain loyal Americans and count on the promises of the Republican party. But on his deathbed in 1895, his last words were allegedly, “Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!”

Agitation had its costs. In Memphis, Tennessee, Ida B. Wells, the first female editor of an important newspaper, launched an antilynching campaign in 1892. So hostile was the response from the white community that Wells carried a gun to protect herself. When white citizens finally destroyed the press and threatened her partner, Wells left Memphis to pursue her activism elsewhere.

Some black leaders called for black separatism within white America. T. Thomas Fortune wrote in the black New York Freeman in 1887 that “there will one day be an African Empire.” Three years later, he organized the Afro-American League (a precursor of the NAACP), insisting that blacks must join together to fight the rising tide of discrimination. “Let us stand up,” he urged, “in our own organization where color will not be a brand of odium.” The league encouraged independent voting, opposed segregation and lynching, and urged the establishment of black institutions such as banks to support black businesses. As a sympathetic journalist explained, “The solution of the problem is in our own hands. . . . The Negro must preserve his identity.”

Although some promoted black nationalism, most blacks worked patiently but persistently within white society for equality and social justice. In 1887, J. C. Price formed the Citizens Equal Rights Association, which supported various petitions and direct-action campaigns to protest segregation. The association also called for state laws to guarantee equal rights in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s 1883 ruling. Other blacks sought to gain rights in southern cities and petitioned Congress, demanding reparations for unpaid labor as slaves.

Efforts to escape oppression in the South, such as “Pap” Singleton’s movement to found black towns in Tennessee and Kansas, continued. In the 1890s, black leaders lobbied to make the Oklahoma Territory, recently opened to white settlement, an all-black state. Blacks founded 25 towns there as well as many towns in other states and even in Mexico. But these attempts, like earlier ones, were short-lived, for they were crippled by limited funds and by the hostility of white neighbors. Singleton eventually recommended migration to Canada or Liberia as a final solution, and later black nationalist leaders looked increasingly to Africa. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, a former Union soldier and prominent black leader, despaired of ever securing equal rights for American blacks. He described the Constitution as “a dirty rag, a cheat, a libel” and said that it ought to be “spit upon by every Negro in the land.” In 1894, he organized the International Migration Society to return blacks to Africa, arguing that “this country owes us forty billions of dollars” to help. He succeeded in sending two boatloads of emigrants to Liberia, but this colonization effort worked no more successfully than those earlier in the century.

As Frederick Douglass had long argued, no matter how important African roots might be, blacks had been in the Americas for generations and would have to win justice and equal rights here. W. E. B. Du Bois, the first black to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard, agreed. Yet in 1900, he attended the first Pan-African Conference in London, where he argued that blacks must lead the struggle for liberation both in Africa and in the United States. It was at this conference that Du Bois first made his prophetic comment that “the problem of the Twentieth Century” would be the “problem of the color line.”

Despite these vigorous voices of militant anger and nationalistic fervor, most black Americans continued to follow the slow, moderate, self-help program of Booker T. Washington, the best-known black leader in America. Born a slave, Washington had risen through hard and faithful work to become the principal of Tuskegee Institute, which he personally and dramatically built into the nation’s largest and best-known industrial training school. At Tuskegee, young blacks received a highly disciplined
education in scientific agricultural techniques and vocational skilled trades. Washington believed that economic self-help and the familiar Puritan virtues of hard work, frugality, cleanliness, and moderation would lead to success for African Americans despite the realities of racism. He spent much of his time traveling through the North to secure philanthropic gifts to support Tuskegee. In time, he became a favorite of the American entrepreneurial elite whose capitalist assumptions he shared.

In 1895, Washington was asked to deliver a speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, celebrating three decades of industrial and agricultural progress since the Civil War. He took advantage of that invitation, a rare honor for a former slave, to make a significant statement about the position of blacks in the South. Without a hint of protest, Washington decided “to say something that would cement the friendship of the races.” He therefore proclaimed black loyalty to the economic development of the South while accepting the lowly status of southern blacks. “It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top,” he declared. “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” Although Washington worked actively behind the scenes for black civil rights, in Atlanta, he publicly renounced black interest in either the vote or civil rights as well as social equality with whites. Whites throughout the country enthusiastically acclaimed Washington’s address, but many blacks called his “Atlanta Compromise” a serious setback in the struggle for black rights.

Washington has often been charged with conceding too quickly that political rights should follow rather than precede economic well-being. In 1903, Du Bois confronted Washington directly in The Souls of Black Folk, arguing instead for the “manly assertion” of a program of equal civil rights, suffrage, and higher education in the ideals of liberal learning. A trip through the Black Belt of Dougherty County, Georgia, showed Du Bois the “forlorn and forsaken” condition of southern blacks. The young sociologist saw that most blacks were confined to dependent agricultural labor, “fighting a hard battle with debt” year after year. Although “here and there a man has raised his head above these murky waters . . . a pall of debt hangs over the beautiful land.” Beneath all others was the cotton picker, who, with his wife and children, would have to work from sunup to sundown to pick 100 pounds of cotton to make 50 cents. The lives of most blacks were still tied to the land of the South. If they were to improve their lives, rural blacks would have to organize.

**FARM PROTEST**

During the post–Civil War period, many farmers, black and white, began to realize that only through collective action could they improve rural life. Not all were dissatisfied; midwestern farmers and those near city markets adjusted to changing economic conditions. Southern and western farmers, however, faced new problems that led to the first mass organization of farmers in American history.

**The Grange in the 1860s and 1870s**

The earliest effort to organize white farmers came in 1867 when Oliver Kelley founded the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry. Originally a social and cultural organization, it soon was protesting the powerlessness of the “immense helpless mob” of farmers, victims of “human vampires.” The depression of the 1870s (discussed in Chapter 18) sharpened discontent. By 1875, an estimated 800,000 had joined Kelley’s organization, now known as the National Grange.

The Grangers recognized some, but not all, of the complex changes that had created rural problems. Some of their “reforms” attempted to bypass intermediaries by establishing buying and selling cooperatives. Although many cooperatives failed, they indicated that farmers realized the need for unified action. Midwestern farmers also accused grain elevator operators of cheating them, and they pointed to the railroads, America’s first big business, as the worst offenders. As Chapter 18 will show, cutthroat competition among railroad companies generally brought lower rates. But even though charges dropped nationwide, railroads often set high rates in rural areas, and their rebates to large shippers discriminated against small operators.

Farmers recognized that confronting the mighty railroads demanded cooperation with others, like western businessmen whose interests railroads also hurt, and political action. Between 1869 and 1874, businessmen and farmers successfully pressed Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to pass so-called Granger laws (an inaccurate name, for the
Grangers did not deserve complete credit for them) establishing maximum rates that railroads and grain elevators could charge. Other states set up railroad commissions to regulate railroad rates, or outlawed railroad pools, rebates, passes, and other practices that seemed to represent “unjust discrimination and distortion.”

Railroad companies and grain elevators quickly challenged the new laws. In 1877, the Supreme Court upheld them in *Munn v. Illinois*. Even so, it soon became apparent that state commissions might control local rates but not long-haul rates. While Granger laws did not control the railroads and raised questions difficult to resolve on the local level, they established an important principle. The Supreme Court had made it clear that state legislatures could regulate businesses of a public nature such as the railroads. When the Court reversed its ruling in *Wabash v. Illinois* in 1886, pressure increased on Congress to continue the struggle.

**The Interstate Commerce Act of 1887**

In 1887, Congress responded to farmers, railroad managers who wished to control the fierce competition that threatened to bankrupt their companies, and shippers who objected to transportation rates by passing the Interstate Commerce Act. That legislation required that railroad rates be “reasonable and just,” that rate schedules be made public, and that practices such as rebates be discontinued. The act also set up the first federal regulatory agency, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). The ICC had the power to investigate and prosecute lawbreakers, but the legislation limited its authority to control over commerce conducted between states.

Like state railroad commissions, the ICC found it difficult to define a reasonable rate. Moreover, thousands of cases overwhelmed the tiny staff in the early months of operation. In the long run, the lack of enforcement power was most serious. The ICC’s only recourse was to bring offenders into the federal courts and engage in lengthy legal proceedings. Few railroads worried about defying ICC directions on rates. When they appeared in court four or five years later, they often won their cases from judges suspicious of new federal authority. Between 1887 and 1906, a total of 16 cases made their way to the Supreme Court, which decided 15 of them in the railroads’ favor. As one railroad executive candidly admitted, “There is not a road in the country that can be accused of living up to the rules of the Interstate Commerce Law.”

**The Southern Farmers’ Alliance in the 1880s and 1890s**

The Grange declined in the late 1870s as the nation recovered from depression. But farm protest did not die. Depression struck farmers once again in the late 1880s and worsened in the early 1890s. Official statistics told the familiar, dismal story of falling grain prices on the plains and prairies. The national currency shortage, which usually reached critical proportions at harvest time, helped drive agricultural prices ever lower. Debt and shipping costs, however, climbed. It sometimes cost a farmer as much as one bushel of corn to send another bushel to market. Distraught farmers again tried organization, education, and cooperation.

The Southern Farmers’ Alliance became one of the most important reform organizations of the 1880s. Its ambitious organizational drive sent lecturers across the South and onto the Plains. Alliance lecturers proposed programs that would help realize their slogan: “Equal rights to all, special privileges to none.” Among the Alliance’s efforts were experiments with cooperatives to free farmers from the clutches of supply merchants, banks, and other credit agencies. While cooperatives often failed, the Alliance also supported legislative efforts to regulate powerful monopolies and corporations that, they believed, gouged farmers. Many Alliance members believed that increasing the money supply was critical to improving the position of farmers and supported a national banking system empowered to issue paper money. Finally, the Alliance called for a variety of measures to improve the quality of rural life. Better rural public schools, state agricultural colleges, and improvements in the status of women were all on its agenda.

By 1890, rural discontent swept more than a million farmers into the Alliance. Included in this burst of organization growth were black as well as white farmers. Organized in 1888, the Colored Farmers’ Alliance recognized that farmers of both races shared common economic problems and therefore must cooperate. But many southern cotton farmers, depending on black labor, disagreed. In 1891, black cotton pickers on plantations near Memphis went on strike. Revealing the racial tensions simmering...
just below the surface, white posses chased the strikers and lynched 15 of them.

The Ocala Platform, 1890
In December 1890, the National Alliance gathered in Ocala, Florida, to develop a platform. Most delegates believed that the federal government had failed to address the farmers’ problems. They attacked both parties as too subservient to the “will of corporation and money power.”

Much of the Alliance’s program was radical in the context of late-nineteenth-century political life. It called for the direct election of U.S. senators and supported lowering the tariff (a topic much debated in Congress) with the dangerous-sounding justification that prices must be reduced for the sake of the “poor of our land.” The money plank went far beyond what any national legislator would consider, boldly envisioning a new banking system controlled by the federal government. The platform called for the government to take an active economic role by increasing the amount of money in circulation in the form of treasury notes and silver. More money would cause inflation and help debtors pay off loans.

The platform also called for subtreasuries (federal warehouses) in agricultural regions where farmers could store their produce at low interest rates until market prices favored selling. To tide farmers over, the federal government would lend farmers up to 80 percent of the current local price for their produce. Other demands included a graduated income tax and the regulation of transportation and communication networks—or, if regulation failed, their nationalization.

Even though a minority of farmers belonged to the Alliance, many Americans feared it. The New York Sun reported that the Alliance had caused a “panic” in the two major parties.

Although the Alliance was not formally in politics, it supported sympathetic candidates in the fall elections of 1890. A surprising number of them won. Alliance victories in the West hurt the Republican party enough to cause President Harrison to refer to “our election disaster.” Before long, many Alliance members were pressing for an independent political party. Legislators elected with Alliance support did not necessarily bring action on issues of interest to farmers, or even respect. On the national level, no one had much interest in the Ocala platform. But among rural spokesmen, the first to realize the necessity of forming an independent third party was Georgia’s Tom Watson, who also knew that success in the South would depend on unity between white and black farmers.

| Timeline | 1860s | 1865–1867 | 1867 | 1869 | 1869–1874 | 1870 | 1871 | 1872 | 1873 | 1874 | 1875 | 1876 | 1877 | 1878 | 1880s | 1881 | 1883–1885 | 1884 | 1885–1886 | 1887 | 1888 | 1890 | 1890s | 1891 | 1892 | 1895 | 1896 |
|----------|------|----------|------|------|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|          | Cattle drives from Texas begin | Sioux wars on the Great Plains | National Grange founded | Transcontinental railroad completed | Granger laws | Financial panic triggers economic depression | Barbed wire patented | Black Hills gold rush incites Sioux war | Custer’s last stand at Little Big Horn | Munn v. Illinois | Bonanza farms in the Great Plains | Timber and Stone Act | Attempts to create a “New South” | Tuskegee Institute founded | Depression | Southern Farmers’ Alliance founded | 1886 Severe winter ends cattle boom | Wabash v. Illinois | Dawes Severalty Act | Interstate Commerce Act | Farm prices plummet | Colored Farmers’ Alliance founded | 1890 Afro-American League founded | Sioux ghost dance movement | Massacre at Wounded Knee | Ocala platform | Yosemite National Park established | 1890s Black disfranchisement in the South | Jim Crow laws passed in the South | Declining farm prices | 1891 Forest Reserve Act | 1892 Sierra Club founded | 1895 Booker T. Washington’s “Atlanta Compromise” address | 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson |
Conclusion

Farming in the Industrial Age

The late nineteenth century brought turbulence to rural America. The “Indian problem,” which had plagued Americans for 200 years, was tragically solved for a while, but not without resistance and bloodshed. Few whites found these events troubling. Most were caught up in the challenge of responding to a fast-changing world. Believing themselves to be the backbone of the nation, white farmers brought Native American lands into cultivation, modernized their farms, and raised bumper crops. But success and a comfortable competency eluded many of them. Some, like Milton Leeper, never gave up hope or farming. Many were caught in a cycle of poverty and debt. Others fled to towns and cities as did the Ebbesen family. Once there, many joined the industrial workforce, described in the next chapter. Some turned to collective action and politics. Their actions demonstrate that they did not merely react to events but attempted to shape them.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Compare and contrast farming on the Great Plains with farming in California.
2. How did technology affect agriculture and mining in the West?
3. Describe the differing viewpoints of Native Americans and whites and the differing cultural values lying behind these viewpoints.
4. What were the reasons that the New South did not achieve its goals?
5. Compare and contrast the treatment of Native Americans and African Americans in this period. Are there any similarities?
6. In what ways did agricultural life in the West and South create conditions that did not mesh with the ideals of American life?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film

Willa Cather’s novels *My Antonia* (1918) and *O Pioneers!* (1913) emphasize the energy and determination of those farming in the post–Civil War West as well as the presence of immigrants there. O. E. Rölvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* (1927) deals with immigrant families but gives a very grim picture of their adjustment to farming life in the United States. Written in 1885 by Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don* provides insights into the views of Mexican Americans. *The Searchers* (1956), *Stagecoach* (1939), and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) come from the heyday of western films and reveal mid-twentieth century (and John Wayne’s) views of the late frontier. *Dances with Wolves* (1990) is Kevin Costner’s indictment of the white assault on Native American life and culture. His sympathetic depiction of Native American life bears marks of the consciousness of the 1990s. *Ethnic Notions* (1987), an Emmy-winning documentary by Marlon Riggs, traces the evolution of negative stereotypes of African Americans and the ways these stereotypes have been embodied in popular culture.
Discovering U.S. History Online

McCormick Farm
www.vaes.vt.edu/steeles/mccormick/harvest.html
Cyrus Hall McCormick invented the McCormick reaper, and his former farm is now owned by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. This site chronicles various stages of harvesting technological development via an interactive photo essay.

Heroes and Villains
www.ukans.edu/carrie/kancoll
Part of the Kansas Collection Gallery, this site offers glimpses of heroes and villains of the West via books, letters, diaries, photos, and other materials from the past.

Fort Larned National Historic Site
www.nps.gov/fols/home.html
The companion Web site for Fort Larned, a preserved fort from the “Indian Wars Period,” offers a virtual tour of the fort, information about the Buffalo Soldiers, soldier equipment, Plains Indians, and other learning tools and facts.

Yosemite History
www.yosemite.ca.us/history
This site presents articles contemporary to Yosemite’s creation and biographies of key figures, maps, and photos.

Native American Documents
www.csusm.edu/projects/nadp/nadp.htm
Several documents relating to Native Americans have been transcribed and indexed for use on this site. The documents include indexed published reports of the commissioner of Indian affairs and the Board of Indian Commissioners for 1871, “allotment” data, and more than 100 documents from the Rogue River War and Siletz Reservation.

Lynching in America
www.journale.com/withoutsanctuary/index.html
This site presents a stark visual history of lynching in the South. The site includes a flash movie with narration.

The Grange Society
www.indianhill.org/History/Hist018.htm
This local historical site gives an example of an agricultural society that became an increasingly “commercialized industry.”

Farmers’ Alliance and Colored Farmers’ Alliance
www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/aaf2.html
www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/CC/aac1.html
These two articles from this online “multidisciplinary encyclopedia of Texas history” give more detail about these allied farm-protest organizations.