

The Gilded Age

*The Development of the Industrial
United States (1870–1900)*



Immigration and urbanization

Social change

The Western frontier

Politics

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

Icons: For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will learn about the continuing western expansion of the U.S. and understand key points associated with:

- Farming, cattle ranching and gold mining
- Life on the Western frontier
- Clashes with Native Americans.

People continued to expand westward, drawn by the lure of cheap land. The expansion of the railroads helped create new opportunities. The 1862 **Homestead Act** gave many people the chance to stake a claim in land or buy it very cheaply.

New technologies helped to make farming the Great Plains easier, including steel plows, drills, reapers and binders.



Life on the frontier was hard work and lonely. Although farms produced huge quantities of wheat to feed the population and for export, few small farmers prospered.

 Why do you think so few farmers prospered? 



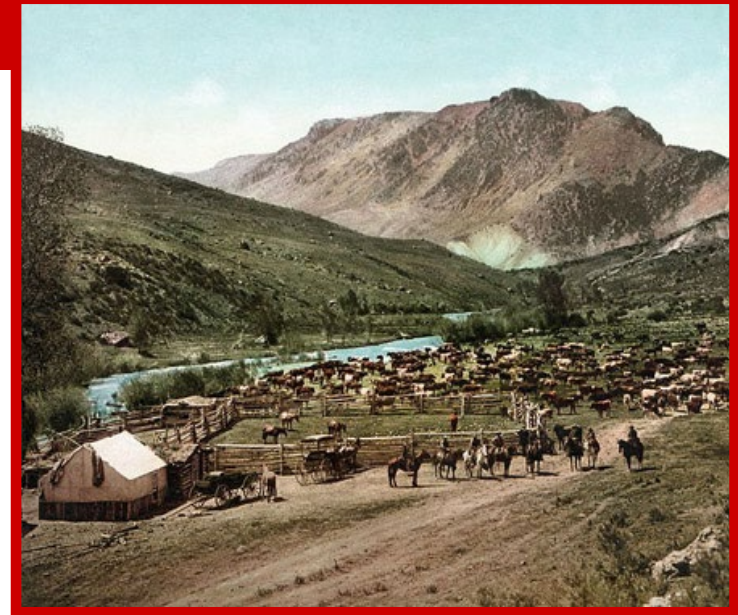
Cattle ranching



A growing population meant that food production needed to increase to meet demand. Large-scale food production, such as cattle ranching, became big business.

Ranchers hired cowboys to drive cattle north from Texas to the railroads of the Great Plains, where the cattle left for meat packing plants in the Midwest.

It is from this period that the romantic vision of the lone cowboy emerged. However, there was little romance in herding cattle over hundreds of miles in blistering heat. It was dull, grueling work in a lawless land.



Why do you think depictions of cowboys were glorified?



The long cattle drive followed several main routes north from its origins in Texas. The drives were only used for about 20 years in the late 19th century. Press the buttons to see the route of the drives and the territorial changes that took place in this period.

Press **start** to begin.

start



Why did the long cattle drive only last until the 1880s?



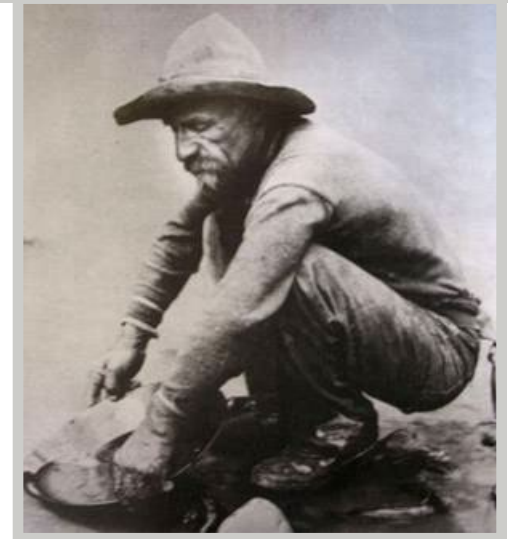
Gold mining



The discovery of gold in 1848 in California prompted many men to head west in hopes of finding their fortune. By 1849, news of the discovery had spread around the world.

About 300,000 people moved to California, from all walks of life. Few made large profits, and most made very little.

The gold rush helped other entrepreneurial ventures. Towns in the Midwest were launching points for people heading west, selling food and gear. Towns with saloons and gambling joints grew up around mines.



How did the gold rush impact Californian life?



Throughout the 19th century, many Americans expanded westward into new lands. These people were often pioneers, seeking new opportunities, new land and a new way of life.

Read this passage about frontier life and select the correct word to fill each blank.

Press **start** to begin.

start





Native tribes in the West had a wide variety of different cultures. While some were governed by complex hierarchies, others lived in small, nomadic bands that were loosely linked with others of the same tribe.

Some Indians developed agricultural societies, while others hunted and gathered food, living off the natural abundance of the land.



Horses gave them speed and mobility and the buffalo was of central importance, providing food, clothing, shelter and tools.

Why might Native Americans choose a nomadic existence over settling down to grow crops?



Clashes on the frontier



As the United States continued to expand, the growing nation came into conflict with the native peoples already living on the land. There were regular clashes between settlers and natives. Watch this animation to learn more.

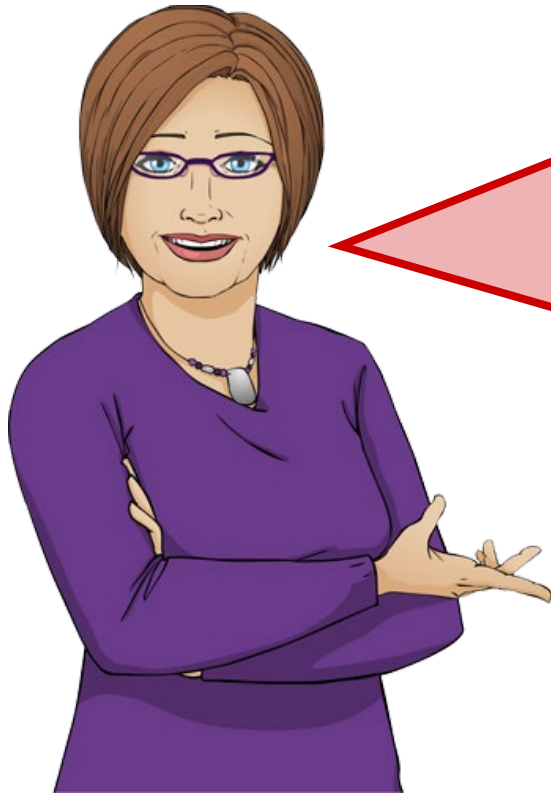
Press **start** to begin.

start





By the turn of the 20th century, the frontier was gone. Westward expansion had reached the Pacific Coast and settlers had divided the lands west of the Mississippi.



The end of the Indian Wars, the demise of the long cattle drive and the increasing reach of industrialization brought the frontier to an end. Increasing demand for order brought new western territories and states into the union throughout the late 19th century, ending with Arizona and New Mexico in 1912.

Does the frontier have any legacies for American life?