Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

LO 1 Evaluate the accuracy of the term New South in describing the post–Civil War South, and discuss ways in which the term was and was not appropriate.

LO 2 Describe the development of the American West that took place during the last half of the nineteenth century, addressing both the role that industrialization played and the final defeat of the native tribes on the plains.

LO 3 Discuss the problems that confronted America’s farmers during the late 1800s, and describe how their attempts to solve those problems led to the formation of a new political party.
Urban life had been part of the northern landscape since the colonial era. This was not the case in the newly developing South and West.

While the industrial North grew tremendously during the years after the Civil War, it had a foundation on which to grow. Factories were familiar sights in the North starting in the late eighteenth century, and urban life had been part of the landscape since the colonial era. This was not the case in the newly developing South and West.

In the South of the 1870s and 1880s, a collection of regional civic boosters attempted to harness the power of the Industrial Revolution to reshape the image of that region. In the antebellum era, the South was powered by a few crops (especially “King Cotton”) and controlled politically and economically by a handful of wealthy families. And of course it was slaves who had done much of the laboring in that society. Post-Reconstruction civic boosters, however, made the argument that, after the Civil War, a “New South” had emerged, one based on economic opportunity, rich natural resources, and increased racial equality. While these hopes were sometimes met (some cities did in fact blossom), the promise of the New South was all too often frustrated. This frustrated promise was manifested in perhaps the deepest legacy of the New South: the system of racial segregation known as Jim Crow.

But even the South had more of an industrial foundation upon which to grow than the West. No region of the country was transformed more rapidly by the changes of the Industrial Age than the land west of the Mississippi River. During the final third of the nineteenth century, vast stretches of arable land were rapidly populated by millions of Americans who built great cities, decimated Indian populations, and created industries controlled by industrial magnates. (The cowboy, the most memorable image of the late-nineteenth-century West, was often working at the behest of a millionaire industrialist who was sending cattle to a slaughterhouse in one of the West’s new great cities.)

But farming would remain central to both the South and the West, and the corporate-friendly politics whose unresponsiveness sparked the labor movement in the North provoked a rural movement for reform in the South and the West. Collectively called the Populist movement, it was often just as radical in its challenges to industrial capitalism as the labor movement, and it too would encounter more frustration than success. But these rural reformers put forward a platform that would succeed long after the Populists had exited the political stage.

This chapter examines the development of the New South and the industrializing West and then turns to the rural reform movement that emerged from, and sometimes unified, these two distinct regions.
The “New South”

Even before the Market Revolution, the South lagged behind the North in urbanization and industrialization, mainly because of its dependence on slavery and the domination of plantation owners in the state governments during the antebellum period. But after the war, southerners such as Henry Grady, the owner and editor of the Atlanta Constitution, argued that the South should improve its cities and provide for the growth of industry. It should partake in the Industrial Revolution and encourage economic relations with the North, including accepting northern loans. Grady’s stirring speech “The New South” argued that the postwar South was a different world from the antebellum South, especially because it was not built on the subjugation of an entire race or the domination of a single industry like cotton. A spirit of enterprise characterized southern life in the late 1870s and 1880s, he argued.

Southern iron, steel, and textile industries all emerged during the thirty-five years following the Civil War, as did numerous cities. Still, despite Grady’s celebration of cooperation between black and white southerners in the New South, blacks rarely benefited from any of these changes. Worse still, the era bore witness to the rise of the segregated society that would last until the 1960s and beyond. Thus, there were two components of the New South:

1. the halting and haphazard creation of an industrialized South, and
2. the quick and summary creation of a racial caste system. If many southerners shared the optimism, energy, and inventiveness that characterized the Industrial Revolution in the North, it nonetheless manifested itself far differently.

Southern Industries

Southern industry grew up around railroads, iron manufacture, and textile production. However, the South never developed a strong industrial base, at least not one comparable to what was taking place in the North.

Railroads

Railroads led the South’s industrial expansion, attracting capital from wealthy northern investors. The railroads also provided much-needed connections between the cities and towns of the South. Before the Civil War and up until about 1880, southern railroad development was very slow. But between 1880 and 1890—just one ten-year period—southern rails grew from 16,605 miles to 39,108 miles, an increase of more than 100 percent. Southern state governments poured resources into supporting rail companies, and northern rail companies began to expand into southern states, seeing an opportunity for profit and growth in the developing southern economy. By 1890, southern railroads had become a model for railroad development worldwide.

Iron Production

The expansion of the railroads also helped foster the urbanization of southern cities and the growth of the iron industry. Many New South advocates hoped that iron production would become the central means for the South to compete with the North in industry. Because the demand for iron was high, especially in construction trades and in laying railroad lines, the iron industry seemed an ideal place to invest money and resources. As a result, it grew; the southern iron industry expanded seventeenfold in the 1880s.

Cotton and Textiles

The easy transportation provided by railroads also allowed for the expansion of the southern textile industry. The industry grew fast in the South because of the abundance of cheap labor and the wide availability of cotton. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, a mill-building craze swept the South. In 1870, about 10,000 people were employed in textile manufacturing. By 1900, nearly 100,000 people worked in the industry. The work was harsh, reflecting the typical labor conditions of the Industrial Age. It was not uncommon for a mill worker to work a fourteen-hour day.

Industrial Failures

Despite the growth of the southern iron and textile industries, hopes of a new industrial South...
proved fleeting. The growth of the steel industry in Pennsylvania eventually surpassed southern iron production. Furthermore, although textile growth was impressive, the industry employed only a small percentage of southerners, and wages were as much as 30 percent lower than they were in the North, limiting the development of an expansive marketplace (because there were fewer dollars in circulation). Finally, although men like Grady had touted the contributions of African Americans, most black southerners were still barred from industrial employment. Poor white people were far more likely to be employed in railroads, iron, or textiles than African Americans, and these poor whites often resisted efforts at integration in their workplaces. Despite the industrial developments of the late 1800s, agriculture still led the southern economy.

**Southern Urbanization**

For supporters of the New South, Birmingham, Alabama, became the symbol of southern urbanization. The city was ideally suited for growth because the Louisville and Nashville Railroad connected Birmingham with coal-mining towns all over Alabama, making it easy to ship the raw iron ore to the city’s production facility. Birmingham became the center of the South’s iron production in the late nineteenth century. Visitors from all over the world marveled at Birmingham’s growth and its promise for future expansion. Many investors, including industrialist Andrew Carnegie, fueled this growth by pouring money into Birmingham’s iron production.

Atlanta, Nashville, and Memphis all followed suit, taking precedence over Old South, water-centered cities like New Orleans and Charleston. But beyond them, similar cities were slow to grow in the South. There was simply not enough industry to merit continued expansion, in part because of southerners’ unwillingness to increase wages for the South’s black population, which would have expanded markets, encouraged growth, and made southern industry competitive. Immigrants, who could choose where to settle, chose the cities of the North over those of the South because of the depressed wages throughout the South.

**Segregation in the New South**

Worse than low wages, though, was the southern drive to repeal political and social rights for black people. After the North retreated from military rule of the South in 1877, race relations became both rigid and violent, especially in areas where black and white Americans competed for economic opportunities. Southern white Democrats continued to deprive African Americans of their civil and political rights by passing laws that disenfranchised African Americans and separated blacks from whites. These efforts were coupled with an even more violent effort to block black citizens from participating in southern public life. Both efforts would prove only too successful. While the South did not have a monopoly on racism, it was where 95 percent of African Americans lived in 1865.

**Racial Disenfranchisement**

Since the decline of Reconstruction, southern states had sought to disenfranchise African American voters. Formal disenfranchisement began in Mississippi in 1890. This “Second Mississippi Plan,” as it became known, established legal barriers to prevent African Americans from voting. The
Jim Crow laws
State and local laws, usually passed in southern states, that mandated racial segregation in public facilities, including schools, restaurants, and rail cars

Louisiana Separate Car Act
1890 law mandating that black people and white people ride in separate train cars; challenged by Homer Plessy

Plessy v. Ferguson
1896 Supreme Court case that declared that segregation laws were constitutional, claiming that, as long as the accommodations were “separate but equal,” it was legal to have separate facilities for black and white Americans

Atlanta Compromise
Speech delivered by Booker T. Washington in 1895, encouraging black economic development and assuaging white fears of racial intermingling; black and white people, he said, should remain as separate as the fingers on a hand, but they should work together to reach common economic ground

hierarchy of races
A theory based on the idea that some racial groups are superior to others; in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many Americans used purported scientific evidence and social science data to argue that white people from British descent sat atop the hierarchy, while racial minorities and new immigrants were less sophisticated and less capable of self-rule

plan served as a model for other states, and politicians across the South amended their state constitutions to deny blacks voting rights (South Carolina did so in 1895, Louisiana in 1898, and North Carolina in 1900). They did this through a series of questionable laws, such as the poll tax, which required voters to pay a fee to vote; literacy tests, which required voters to prove various levels of literacy; and property qualifications, which disqualified most black people, who were often too poor to own property. Eventually black citizens in every southern state effectively lost the right to vote. For example, in Louisiana, 95.6 percent of the state’s black population was registered to vote in 1896, and more than half of them voted. In 1904, after the passage of these shady laws, only 1,342 of the state’s black people were still registered—more than a 90 percent decline in just eight years.

Jim Crow Segregation
Disenfranchisement occurred simultaneously with the development of other laws between 1890 and 1913 that segregated African Americans from white Americans in every public place in the South. These laws, known as Jim Crow laws, prevented African Americans from attending the same schools as white people or sitting in the same areas of restaurants. Citing these Jim Crow laws, one historian has called the 1890s the nadir of American race relations.

Plessy v. Ferguson
Black people, of course, challenged these laws, but they were mostly frustrated in their efforts. The most important case emerged in Louisiana, when Homer Plessy, who claimed to be one-eighth black, challenged segregation on trains by sitting in a white car and announcing that he was black. Plessy intentionally violated the 1890 Louisiana Separate Car Act in order to support a local protest movement against the law. After his arrest, Plessy hoped that the courts would rule that the law violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The case eventually went to the Supreme Court, which, in 1896, issued one of its landmark decisions. In Plessy v. Ferguson, the Court declared that segregation laws were constitutional, claiming that, as long as the accommodations were “separate but equal,” it was legal to have separate facilities for black and white America. The nation’s highest court had evaluated racial segregation and let it stand.

Lynching
Violence was another form of political and social intimidation, and it was especially effective in areas where black and white Americans competed for similar jobs. Much of this violence came in the form of lynching, whereby a mob would gather to murder (usually by hanging, then burning) someone whom they believed to have violated a law or social custom. In the 1880s and 1890s, nearly 2,000 black men were lynched in the South. For more on why southerners created the system known as Jim Crow, see “The reasons why...” box.

African American Responses
Although every African American had thoughts on the rise of racial segregation in the South, there were two major responses from the African American community. The first called for black Americans to accommodate to their situation and not fight for political and civil rights, focusing instead on economic success. Booker T. Washington exemplified this accommodationist response. In Atlanta in 1895, he delivered a speech known as the Atlanta Compromise, encouraging black economic development and assuaging white fears of racial intermingling. Black and white people, Washington said, should remain as separate as the fingers on a hand, but they should work together to reach common economic ground. Economic progress, he
There were at least four reasons why southerners created the racially segregated system known as Jim Crow during the decades after the Civil War:

History of slavery. The South, of course, was where the vast majority of American slaves lived before the Civil War, and the major underlying cause of the war was the perpetuation of slavery. Despite losing the war, many southerners sought to restore the South to what they idealized as its ante-bellum grandeur. This imperfect vision included, and indeed was predicated upon, creating a racist system as close to slavery as possible. The segregated social vision was, however, historically inaccurate, because slavery relied on relatively close proximal relations between black and white people, whereas segregation introduced social and spatial differences that were entirely new.

Science. The South did not have a monopoly on racism, though, and in most states throughout the nation black people could not vote and were denied many other basic rights. Indeed, the best science at the time openly advocated that the white race was superior and ranked the other races in descending order, with African Americans almost always at the bottom. Measurements of skulls and a variety of aptitude tests seemed to confirm the thesis. Using this hierarchy of races, white Americans in the North rebuked southern and eastern European immigrants (who were often deemed “white”). White Americans in the West confidently lorded over Indians and Chinese. And white Americans in the South found justification for creating a social system that not only denied basic rights to African Americans but also segregated them from the rest of society. A large part of the fear, it must be noted, was that these evolutionary “lesser” beings might try to improve their genetic stock by having sexual relations with white women, and interracial sex became a bogeyman behind much of the South’s justification for segregation.

Economics. In 1865, about 95 percent of African Americans lived in the South. When the Industrial Age came south, the availability of black workers often kept wages low. This created tremendous animosity from much of the South’s white working class. They argued that if black workers could be denied access to certain jobs, wages for white workers would go up. Indeed, the towns that had the highest number of lynchings in this period were those that had witnessed industrial growth and that had a competitive number of African American and white workers.

Politics. The Democratic Party shamelessly took advantage of all these factors, using its political power in the South to create the legal system of segregation known as Jim Crow. While claiming to be honoring southern history and using science as its justification, the Democratic Party secured votes by calling for racial solidarity within the white working class. When the Populist Party threatened to create an interracial working-class party, the Democrats fought back by calling for racial solidarity and by disenfranchising the “unfit” African American voters. By the 1890s, the legal system of segregation that would last until the 1960s was largely in place.

The “New South” believed, could take place without racial integration. Washington believed that self-help within the African American community would stop the violence and allow for the progress of the race. Washington had enormous influence in the late nineteenth century, and his beliefs won wide support among white and black people into the twentieth century.

The other response from black America exemplified a refusal to compromise. For example, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, a writer and editor, led a crusade against lynching during the late nineteenth century after three of her friends were murdered in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1892, Wells-Barnett authored one of the most powerful antilynching pamphlets in the country, Southern Horrors. She became internationally famous for her protests.

W. E. B. Du Bois similarly criticized Washington’s Atlanta speech. In the Niagara Movement (an attempt at political organization among black activists in the early 1900s, W. E. B. Du Bois drafted a “Statement of Principles,” which declared that African Americans should fight for their rights rather than accept abuse and separation.
The New South and the Industrializing West

At the end of the Civil War, the South was in a state of social and political upheaval. The former Confederate states were trying to reinstate antebellum social practices, while many were also aiming to glorify the cause and culture of institutionalized slavery.

The Myth of the Lost Cause

The myth of the lost cause provided cultural justification for the return of white political power. Associated with the defeat of the Confederacy, the myth was first presented in Edward Pollard’s book *The Lost Cause* (1866). The war, as portrayed by Pollard, was a valiant effort fought against overwhelming odds to protect southern independence. Slavery, he argued, was not a cause of the Civil War; rather, it was northern aggression that disrupted the peaceful relationship between white masters and black slaves. Many organizations were established in the late-nineteenth-century South that defended this myth. These included the Southern Historical Society, founded in 1869 by a former Confederate general to promote a “proper” interpretation of the Civil War; the United Confederate Veterans Association, founded to establish a “Confederate Memorial Day”; and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, founded in 1895 to celebrate the southern war effort. Many northerners, racists themselves, were all too eager to accept this demotion of the importance of slavery as a cause of the war, and throughout the North historians reconceptualized the history of Reconstruction as a horror, characterized not by the violence of the Ku Klux Klan, but by corrupt black domination.

African American Cultural Life

As white southerners variously confronted the impact of the Civil War and the meaning of the region’s race relations, African Americans found ways to support their struggle for freedom and independence. For example, in Texas, black Americans celebrated their own holidays to keep the issues surrounding slavery and the Civil War alive. The celebration of *Juneteenth*, marking the date that slaves were formally freed in Texas (June 19, 1865), was
the most popular of these holidays, and it spread to black communities across the South. It is still celebrated in many southern communities today. But two other institutions reveal the central concerns of southern blacks in the late nineteenth century: (1) education and (2) the church.

Black Literacy and Educational Institutions

One of the most important goals of African Americans after the Civil War was expanding educational opportunity. Forbidden from learning to read or write by pre–Civil War slave codes, African Americans made literacy and education a central priority after the war. As a result, black literacy rates grew dramatically in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Schools popped up, and African Americans founded institutions of higher learning, such as Fisk University in Nashville (founded in 1866), Howard University in Washington, D.C. (1867), and Atlanta University in Georgia (1865).

The most prominent institution was Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama (1881). Washington pioneered higher learning for African Americans and devoted his life to the growth of black education at all levels. However, he was often chastised for his belief that it would be better for black Americans to learn practical skills that would prepare them for industrial machine work than to seek other kinds of education, such as the arts and sciences, that might be perceived as challenging the white hierarchy. In this, as in so many other areas, Washington and Du Bois would spar over the relevancy of different kinds of education. Regardless, educational opportunities for African Americans in the South expanded, if in a segregated manner.

Religious Life

The second central institution of black life in the South of the late 1800s was the church. After the war, the role of the black church quickly expanded in African American communities. The largest denominations were the Baptist Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Churches became the central arenas of black social life after the Civil War because they were supposedly apolitical and therefore unthreatening to the South’s white population. Churches did, however, host political meetings and develop social welfare institutions in an era before large-scale public welfare programs existed.

LO2 The Industrializing West

If the South remained burdened by the oppressions of history, including a commitment to racial inequality and the myth of the lost cause, the West carried different burdens. The main burdens of those moving west were getting the soil to produce food and keeping Indians and immigrants at bay. The federal government would turn out to be much more helpful in assisting with the latter development than with the former, although during and after the Civil War the federal government did make land readily available to those with the will to farm it.
But the land of the Great Plains would prove far too dusty and poor for some, and many of these farmers struggled to make a living off their newly acquired land. As they did, large corporations sometimes bought them out, creating what were then called bonanza farms and what we would today call agribusinesses. The West of the late nineteenth century inspired the lore of the “Wild West,” with its tales of cowboys and Indians. And indeed, there were components of the development of the West that were in fact wild. But for the most part, those most interested in the development of the West were corporate interests, usually with bases in the corporate capitals of the North. Like the South, which often depended on northern wealth to industrialize, the West too is sometimes referred to as a mere colony to the rest of the United States.

Expansive Farming

The first American settlers in the West had always been farmers, and before the Civil War, most Americans in the region were involved in agriculture. They might have been grain elevator operators, agricultural commodities brokers, or farmers, but in general, most Americans in the West lived off the land. Chicago and St. Louis were booming towns, and most of their wealth was attributable to processing and distributing natural goods like lumber, corn, cattle, and wheat.

The Homestead Act

This commitment to the land only accelerated during the Civil War, when northern congressmen took advantage of the absence of southerners in Congress and encouraged the expansion of a free-labor West by passing the Homestead Act in 1862. The Homestead Act awarded 160 acres to settlers who occupied the land for five years, and between 1862 and 1890 the Homestead Act led to the creation of almost 400,000 farms, on which some 2 million people eventually lived. African Americans seeking land, northerners seeking to avoid the industrialization of their cities, and new immigrants all came west.

Industrial Farming

Despite the promises of the Homestead Act, the first homesteaders faced particularly severe trials. On the northern Great Plains, rainfall dwindled to as few as eight inches a year, and pioneers, or sodbusters as they were known, faced the ravages of locust swarms, tornadoes, hailstorms, and extreme temperatures. By the 1870s, however, life for Great Plains farmers had improved, mainly because of the Industrial Revolution. Between 1870 and 1910, eastern urban populations increased by 400 percent, stimulating demand for western wheat and other crops. In response to this new demand, the eastern plains from Minnesota and the Dakotas and south to Texas became the nation’s wheat belt. Corn and hog production also spread throughout much of the West. In addition, the nation’s growing rail network offered more, better, and cheaper connections to the markets of the East. Indeed, moving the western commodities was one of the principal reasons for railroad expansion throughout the nineteenth century.
The Industrializing West

Industry in the West

Besides farming, three major industries shaped the post–Civil War western economy: railroads, cattle, and mining.

The Railroads

During the Civil War, northern congressmen passed several internal improvement bills, including several that assisted the development of railroads in the West. Their efforts were just the beginning: During the 1800s, Congress awarded various railroad companies more than 223 million acres to encourage the construction of lines connecting East and West. The arrival of a railroad depot spurred the creation of towns. If an established town lay far from the newly built railroad lines, that town usually dwindled into nonexistence. As a boy, Thomas Edison’s family was forced to leave Milan, Ohio, after the railroads bypassed the town.

The Cattle Industry

Cattle was one of the industries that railroads developed the most (see Map 19.1). Beginning in the 1860s, cowboys began to lead mass cattle drives from Texas, where most cattle were, to various cities along the railroad lines, especially Abilene, Kansas. Abilene was the nation’s first “cow town,” or town developed in order to facilitate the movement of cattle from Texas and Oklahoma to other parts of the country. From places like Abilene, the cattle would then be moved via rail to Chicago’s slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants, where the animals would be slaughtered and the meat packaged and sent in refrigerated rail cars to eastern markets. Cowboys (who were actually employees of large corporations working to supply the world’s demand for beef) largely disappeared by the 1880s. Barbed wire, first patented in 1874 and spread through the West by the late 1880s, closed the open ranges on which the cowboys’ long drives depended. Between 1865 and 1885, the work of being a cowboy attracted some 40,000 young men from a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds. Many were white, but about 30 percent of the West’s cowboys were either Mexican or African American; hundreds were Indian.

The Mining Industry

The third pillar of western industry was mining (see Map 19.1), mainly for gold, silver, copper, and coal. Mining had fostered much of the original settlement in the West, when the first California gold rush of 1849 established the rollicking, boom-and-bust cycle that defined the region’s economy. Yet
the nature of mining changed dramatically after the Civil War, when most of the gold and silver deposits within reach of individual prospectors had been exhausted. Large investors with access to new technology displaced the roughshod world of the forty-niners. Unlike earlier rushes, the silver strike at Colorado’s Leadville (1877) and the gold strike at Cripple Creek (1891) offered few opportunities for individual prospectors because big companies controlled access to the mines. As in the North and the South, large corporations controlled most of the wealth in the industrializing West.
the capital of western commerce. It developed meatpacking plants to turn cattle into cash and a stock market where speculators could bet on that year’s yield. By 1900, 1.7 million people lived in Chicago. And Chicago was not alone. By 1890, a greater percentage of westerners lived in cities than in any other region in the nation. Cities like Dodge City, Kansas, transitioned from a fur-trading post to a cattle town to a stockyard city.

**Outsiders in the Industrializing West**

The two groups that did not mesh with the way of life developing in the West were the American Indians and the Chinese; both were persecuted.

**Subjugating the Plains Indians**

As always, westward migration entailed conflict with Indians. Like immigrants in the northern cities and African Americans in the South, American Indians suffered from the white Americans’ racism, paternalism, and belief that the United States had a “manifest destiny” to control all the land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (for more on manifest destiny, see Chapter 13). Although conflict was constant, violence between white Americans and Indians accelerated during the Civil War, as Union troops streamed into the West to put down various local Confederate revolts. During those travails, it was often difficult to tell where the Civil War ended and the escalating war against the Indians began.

These small “Indian Wars,” as the U.S. Army called them, became commonplace throughout the second half of the 1800s. One conflict that epitomizes the violence is the **Sand Creek Massacre** of 1864. During the early 1860s, the Arapahoe and Cheyenne Indians clashed with white settlers who had been drawn to Colorado by the 1859 Pike’s Peak gold rush. As white settlers began to demand the extermination of the Indians, a handful of chiefs sought peace. During one round of negotiation, a Cheyenne delegation near Denver was told it enjoyed army protection until negotiations were complete. The next morning, November 29, 1864, Colorado militiamen attacked the sleeping Indians. By the day’s end, more than two hundred Cheyenne lay dead. As news of the massacre spread throughout the Great Plains, outrage turned to anger among Indians, and battles between Indian tribes and white settlers escalated.

The increasing violence between Indians and settlers inspired General William T. Sherman, of Civil War fame, to call for the extermination of all the Sioux. But, despite continuing conflict, U.S. government leaders in Washington, especially President Grant, still declared a desire for peace. In 1869, Grant initiated a so-called Peace Policy that consisted of empowering church leaders to distribute payments and food to the Indians. This “conquest through kindness” aimed to turn the Plains Indians, who had been offered open reservations to continue their traditional lifestyles, to the American ideals of private property, settled farming, and Christianity. Nevertheless this paternalistic hope, Grant warned tribes that any Native Americans unprepared to make peace on his terms would be subject to continued military
action. In essence, he told them to accept his terms or face eventual destruction.

Unfortunately, many Americans did not follow Grant’s Peace Policy, choosing instead to continue to invade lands guaranteed to Indians. One such example is the 1874 military expedition, under General George Armstrong Custer’s command, into the Black Hills of present-day South Dakota. When Custer reported to eastern newspapers that there was “gold among the roots of the grass,” American prospectors streamed into land not only considered sacred by the Sioux but also promised to them in an 1868 treaty. When the Sioux attacked some prospectors, Custer vowed to protect them. He was unable to do so. On June 25, 1876, his force came upon an encampment of some 2,500 Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, commanded by Chief Sitting Bull and his lieutenant, Crazy Horse. Despite Custer’s belief that the Indians would cower to the white army, the two tribes annihilated Custer’s division of some 200 troops along the Little Big Horn River, in today’s southeastern Montana.

The Sioux victory at Little Big Horn was short-lived. The winter of 1876–1877 saw a massive counterattack that caused most of the Indian alliance to surrender. Chief Sitting Bull and some 50 Sioux escaped to Canada. However, cut off from bison, they had a difficult time finding food, and, in 1881, they too surrendered to U.S. forces. Other Indian efforts at resistance also failed. For example, in 1877, Chief Joseph and the Nez Percé tribe refused to be moved from their lands in Idaho to a reservation in Washington. Rather than fight, Joseph led a brilliant retreat to Canada with about 250 of his warriors and 450 noncombatants. The army followed Chief Joseph’s party through 1,700 miles of mountains before catching up to them and demanding their surrender.

I do not come to fight the white men. If you leave me alone I will harm no one. I have been driven from my home by the white men and am going to the buffalo country to find another.”

—Chief Joseph, according to his biographer

The Dawes Act

By the 1870s, many reformers and U.S. policymakers decided that placing American Indians on large reservations might not be the best way to bring order to white-Indian relations. For one thing, reservations obstructed the routes of some planned railroads. Furthermore, reformers, such as Helen Hunt Jackson, criticized the U.S. policy on humanitarian grounds. Jackson wrote A Century of Dishonor (1881), which examined the treaties that the United States continuously broke with Indian tribes.

Arguments from these reformers led to the passage of the Dawes General Allotment Act, which became federal law in 1887. As with Grant’s “Peace Plan,” the act demonstrated an attempt to alter the tribal nature of Indians. It declared that lands held by tribes were to be divided among families and individuals. To prevent speculators from getting title to the lands, the act did not allow Indians to sell them; instead, the government held the land in trust for twenty-five years.

At the end of the twenty-five years, individual Indians were to receive title to the land and become U.S. citizens. This was yet another attempt to wage peace by conversion. In the prevailing American view, Indians were capable of citizenship, but they were not quite there yet, so they needed to be treated as wards of the state until they learned the ways of American citizens.

As it turned out, the Dawes Act did not help Indians establish farms because the arid land of the northern Plains was unsuited to agriculture. In addition, despite the alleged safeguards, tribal lands were often lost by fraud or coercion, so that, by 1934, white Americans owned two-thirds of lands originally reserved for Indians. Most pointedly, the Dawes Act struck at Indians’ greatest strength—their communal ethos—by dividing many of the reservations into individual plots of land.

Dire Circumstances

In the midst of these efforts, conditions in the tribes became desperate. In particular, the loss of the bison
proved devastating to the way of life that had sustained Indians since they first occupied the Great Plains. In 1865, the number of bison in the United States was some 13 million; by 1891, that number had dwindled to just 865. Railroads and commercial hunters were responsible for most of this decimation. Without bison to hunt, the Plains Indians had little means of subsistence. Confined to reservations, they obtained only a meager living from farming the barren lands provided by relocation treaties. The poor-quality food supplies from the U.S. government sometimes did not come at all because of the widespread corruption in the government’s Bureau of Indian Affairs. Starvation and epidemics pervaded the tribes, making it even more difficult for them to defend themselves against further encroachment.

**Last Attempts at Resistance**

With little hope left, some Indians attempted to participate in a revitalization movement similar to the one preached by Neolin before the Revolutionary War. The central ritual for the Plains Indians became the “Ghost Dance,” a dance lasting five days that, if done properly and at the proper time, would supposedly raise the Indians above the ground while the land below them was replaced with new land, effectively sandwiching the white men between the two layers of sod, removing them forever. But, when too many Indians began attending the mass meetings, they attracted the attention of the U.S. government, which sought to arrest several of the leaders. When an attempt to arrest a Sioux Indian who had fired at the army at Pine Ridge Reservation ended in a small battle, killing the Sioux chief Sitting Bull, a group of Sioux seeking to intervene agreed to the U.S. Army’s command to encamp near the army at Wounded Knee Creek. On December 29, 1890, an accidental rifle discharge led soldiers from the U.S. Army to fire on the Sioux. After what became known as the Wounded Knee Massacre, 39 U.S. soldiers lay dead, while the Sioux suffered 146 deaths, including 44 women and 18 children.

Wounded Knee was the tragic and grisly end of the federal government’s century-long war against the Indians. The next forty years witnessed continuing efforts to break up tribal sovereignty—most notably in Indian territories, where the government forced the liquidation of tribal governments. By 1900, the Indian population had reached its lowest point in American history, bottoming out at just 250,000. The “Wild West” of cowboy-and-Indian lore was gone.

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**The Chinese Exclusion Act**

In addition to subjugating the Plains Indians, white Americans in the West also targeted another population—the Chinese. In the 1850s, Chinese immigrants began traveling to the American West in search of gold and other lucrative minerals. Most never discovered those riches, but ample work for the railroads provided

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**Wounded Knee Massacre**

In 1890, the U.S. Army fired on the Sioux, triggering a battle that left 39 U.S. soldiers and 146 Sioux dead.
Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
Act that banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years and prohibited the Chinese who were already in the United States from becoming citizens

Populist Party
A political party of the 1890s that championed the “farm” cause of land and crops over the powers of banking and credit

Another impetus for migration, and by 1880, more than 200,000 Chinese immigrants had settled in the United States, mostly in California.

Accounts of their lives suggest that most white Americans initially saw them as hardworking people, but as the number of Chinese immigrants increased, many white Americans challenged their right to be in the United States. In the early 1850s, the California legislature passed a tax on “foreign miners,” which led most of the Chinese immigrants to search for work outside of mining. Many found jobs in the railroad industry, which was booming after the Civil War. Indeed, Chinese laborers made up 90 percent of the laborers who worked on the western half of the first transcontinental railroad. Once the American system of railroad tracks was mostly completed, many Chinese immigrants moved to cities, such as San Francisco, and developed an expansive “Chinatown.” Most of the urban Chinese worked as laborers and servants, but some rose to prominence and positions of leadership within their communities. These leaders often joined together to handle community disputes, place workers in jobs, and dispense social services.

In the workplace, however, Chinese laborers gained a reputation for working for lower wages than their white counterparts. This situation led to interethnic hostilities, especially among workers. Denis Kearney, an Irish immigrant who created the Workingman’s Party of California in 1878, made the issue of Chinese immigration a political one. By the late 1870s, anti-Chinese sentiment extended along the entire Pacific Coast.

In 1882, Congress responded to Californians’ demands that something be done to restrict Chinese immigration. At the behest of California’s senators, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years and prohibited the Chinese who were already in the United States from becoming citizens. The bill was renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902. It was the first repudiation of the United States’s entrenched powers of banking and credit.

Problems Confronting Farmers

By the late nineteenth century, the business of farming had become a risky endeavor. In addition to the age-old threats of bad weather and poor crops, farmers now faced a host of new challenges. The greatest changes were in the West, where the Homestead Act of 1862 had prompted the cultivation of the Great Plains. But most farmers were deeply in debt from loans needed to purchase large-scale machinery. While the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution had made farming easier, they had also put farmers more in debt. Meanwhile, the great distances between western farms and the markets of the East increased shipping costs, a problem exacerbated by grain elevator owners and railroad companies, who often exploited their monopolies. Similarly, the increase in the amount of goods shipped to market from the expansive and bountiful Great Plains meant that prices plummeted. Farmers who had taken advantage of the Homestead Act were being stretched thin. They were in debt, and the cost of their product was declining.

Sharecropping as a Problem in the South

In the South, sharecroppers faced additional problems. Sharecroppers usually bought their supplies on credit at a local store; because credit prices were rarely competitive, and because the sharecroppers’ slim profits could not cover what was owed, every year they sank further into debt. Caught in this cycle of poverty, they were especially vulnerable to market changes, which could quickly wipe out their profits.

LO The Populists

If the politics of the Industrial Age seemed to favor business interests over others, this was certainly the sense of those who lived off the land in the South and the West. Farmers both western and southern felt squeezed by a system that seemed stacked against them. Vulnerable to falling crop prices, often saddled with debt, and unable to meet the forces of capitalism on a level playing field, during the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s they formed organizations to protect their rural interests. There were many kinds of farm advocacy groups developed during these years, varying in objective, degree of racial liberalism, and political techniques. But in the 1890s, farmers joined together in the Populist Party, which championed the cause of farmers over what it saw as the entrenched powers of banking and credit.
Deflation
Whatever their specific difficulties, American farmers in the late nineteenth century all confronted the basic problem of falling crop prices. While overproduction played a part in pushing down prices, another, more insidious force was at work: deflation. Between 1873 and 1875, the federal government tried to erase its Civil War debt by putting the nation on a gold standard, taking most paper money ("greenbacks") and silver coins out of circulation and leaving gold as the primary form of currency. But when gold became scarce, the result was deflation, whereby prices fell because there was not enough money circulating in the system. This situation had a ruinous effect on farmers. As deflation pushed down the prices of all goods, including crops, farmers made smaller profits; meanwhile, their debts stayed the same as before.

Farmers Unite
Initially, two movements arose in response to farmers' problems: the Grange Movement and the Farmers' Alliance.

Emergence of the Grange Movement
The first movement to protest the farmer's plight emerged shortly after the Civil War. Founded in Washington, D.C., in 1867, the Grange (formally known as the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry) began life as a local fraternal organization. But by the early 1870s, as deflation plagued farmers, the Grange became a national movement that expressed farmer discontent. In seeking political solutions to the farmers' problems, it did achieve some limited success. Grangers demanded the regulation of railroad rates, for instance, and succeeded in having rate legislation passed in several states, including Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. They also succeeded in having the Supreme Court declare, in the case of Munn v. Illinois (1877), that states could regulate businesses within their borders if those businesses operated in the public interest. But internal divisions ultimately doomed the Grange, and in the late 1870s its influence waned.

Rise of the Farmers' Alliance
In the late 1880s, another national movement known as the Farmers' Alliance emerged. The Farmers' Alliance was a network of smaller local alliances that first sprang up in the early 1880s in pockets of the South and Midwest and then spread to other farming regions. These alliances acted as cooperatives, meaning that they organized farmers into a unified front to gain bargaining power. Like labor unions, alliances hoped to find strength in numbers.

The Turn to Politics
But the alliances failed to be effective because bankers and commercial interests often simply refused to do business with them. The Farmers' Alliance then sought a political remedy. In 1890, Dr. Charles W. Macune, the national movement's leader, lobbied members of the U.S. Congress to support his Subtreasury Plan. Under this plan, crops would be stored in government-owned warehouses and used as collateral for low-cost government loans to struggling farmers.

In 1890, when legislation to enact the plan was defeated in Congress, desperation among American farmers reached a fever pitch. With
The farmers thus entered the political arena with a national movement known as Populism. In 1892, a convention of farmers in Omaha, Nebraska, formed the People's Party (its members were called Populists) to advocate the farmers' concerns in local, state, and federal politics. In addition to addressing such issues as high storage and shipping rates, the Populists sought to reverse deflation so that crop prices would rise, which would enable them to pay down their debts. In particular, they wanted the government to remonetize silver or, in other words, turn silver into an acceptable currency. This would end the economy's reliance on gold, which had made currency hard to find and expensive, and put more currency in the marketplace, boosting prices.

A National Movement

Building from the national network of the Farmers' Alliance, the Populist Movement spread across the country. With its promise of relief for farmers, it overcame existing political and regional loyalties (white southerners were usually Democrats and preoccupied with race, whereas Midwestern farmers, owing their land to Lincoln's Homestead Act, were nearly all Republicans and were less opposed to the presence of black farmers in the movement). Tom Watson, a Populist leader from Georgia, argued that white and black sharecroppers alike were in danger of economic ruin, and he spoke to mixed-race audiences that were temporarily united by the Populist message. Some Populists even advocated bringing in industrial workers to fashion a working-class political party.

The Populists rapidly gained ground in the political arena. In 1892, James Weaver, the Populists' presidential candidate, won several western states, and the hard times that followed a financial panic in 1893 sparked widespread interest in the Populist demands for economic justice. Several Populist candidates won congressional elections in 1894. That same year Populist supporter Jacob Coxey led an army of roughly four hundred workers on a march from Ohio to Washington to demand government jobs for the unemployed. The year 1894 also saw the publication of Coin's Financial School, a national best-seller that made a dramatic appeal for the unlimited government purchase of silver, a plan commonly called "free silver."

The Presidential Election of 1896

The mainstream popularity of currency reform, however, proved to be a double-edged sword for the Populists. In the 1896 presidential election (Map 19.2), Democratic nominee William Jennings Bryan was a charismatic thirty-six-year-old Nebraskan whose embrace of the free-silver position left the Populists in a quandary. As a member of one of the two traditional political parties, Bryan stood the best chance of winning the election, but beyond currency reform, he was not interested in Populist issues such as grain storage. Yet a separate Populist candidate would likely split the vote for Bryan, thus handing victory to Republican nominee William McKinley, who favored the gold standard. Faced with this prospect, the Populist Party nominated Bryan for president and Tom Watson for vice president.

The election was one of the most impassioned in American history and ended badly for the Democrats and the Populists. Bryan, whose free-silver "Cross of Gold" speech ("you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold") is one of the most vivid political speeches in American history, never appealed to the largest voting bloc in the Northeast: urban immigrant workers. These workers actually benefited from deflation's low prices (they did not have large debts), and many were alienated by Bryan's evangelical Protestantism. Bryan carried most of the South and West, but Republican votes in the urban Northeast contributed to his stunning defeat. McKinley gained the presidency, beginning a fourteen-year Republican reign in office and ending the political stalemate that had marked the previous two decades.

The Vanishing of the Populists

After 1896, the Populists' mass movement declined. At the local level, southern Democrats beat them back with calls for white solidarity. More importantly, the long deflationary trend for farmers that had been ongoing since the end of the Civil War finally broke in 1897, allowing many farmers to begin to prosper. When Bryan ran for president again in 1900, he lost even more emphatically than
In spite of their political decline, many of the less radical goals of the Populists were achieved in the twentieth century, including low-interest government loans for farmers, federal regulation of railroad rates, and regulation of the money supply.

The Industrial Revolution affected each region of the United States differently. The North became one of the most industrialized regions in the world, confronting the challenges of immigration, urbanization, and the labor movement. Many southerners, meanwhile, attempted to transform their region into a smaller, more humane industrialized hub, but instead fell back into the racial disparities that had long been part of the region’s identity. Americans in the West took more and more of that region away from American Indians, as homesteaders and corporate farmers tapped into the thin soil in order to provide much of the raw materials for the Industrial Age.

Like many of those in the North, southerners and westerners confronted numerous challenges in adapting to the new era. The land did not always prosper. Racism and fear of outsiders provoked reactionary political responses. And northern businessmen lost interest in the regions once they felt they had tapped their economic potential. Often frustrated by how state and federal governments were not addressing their economic needs, farmers from the West and South combined under the name of the Populists to challenge America’s industrial order. The Populists did not carry out most of their goals, but the issues they brought forward would be central to the third wave of reformers responding to the Industrial Revolution. It is to those reformers, the Progressives, that we now turn.

**And in the end . . .**

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**Map 19.2. The Election of 1896**

Was the original *Wizard of Oz* a Populist parable? Find out!

**What else was happening . . .**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>A horse named Comanche is the only survivor from the losing side in the Battle of Little Big Horn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>The first modern hamburger is made in Seymour, Wisconsin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Pharmacist Caleb Bradham produces “Brad’s Drink” as a digestive aid and energy booster; in 1898 it would be renamed Pepsi-Cola.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>The melody for “Happy Birthday to You” is copyrighted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>