Westward Expansion (after the Civil War)

You studied how the Civil War redefined the nation. Before that conflict, people would say, "The United States *are* . . . ," but after the war they said, "The United States *is* . . . ." That simple change in a verb from plural to singular reflected the transformation of a collection of sovereign states into a nation. Although the Civil War revealed the deep divisions in the country (which, in many ways, continue to exist), it also marked a redefinition of American citizenship in which people began to identify themselves first as Americans and only second as New Yorkers or Georgians.

Americans continued their **westward movement** that began when Europeans first arrived on the East Coast. By 1830, more than a third of the population lived west of the original thirteen colonies. A transportation revolution that improved roads, canals, and steamboats, and the opening by railroads of the interior east of the Mississippi River encouraged people to move. The federally financed National Road began in Baltimore in the 1810s, crossed the Appalachian Mountains, and reached Vandalia, Illinois, by 1850. States financed improvements such as New York's famous Erie Canal, which connected New York City with the Great Lakes in 1825. After steamboat design improved early in the nineteenth century, these vessels moved up and down the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri rivers and their tributaries opening up new regions. But the most remarkable of these transportation changes was the **railroad**. New in 1830, the railroads grew to 31,000 miles of track by 1860. In **1869**, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads met in Promontory Point of Utah Territory where, with the driving of the golden spike, the **first transcontinental line** was completed. The growth of a transportation network together with **industrialization** hastened the transition of the United States from a **rural/agricultural nation to an urban/industrial** one by the early 20th century.

Map from United States Pacific Railway Commission, Report to the Congress of the United States Senate Executive Document No. 51 (50th Congress, 1st Session) and digitized by User: Centpacrr in 2009 and licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. (CC BY-SA 3.0) (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Transcontinental_Railroads_1887.jpg).

Mining Frontier

The United States physically expanded in the first half of the century from sixteen states in 1800 to thirty-one in 1850 then forty-five by 1896 and the forty-eight continental states by 1912. A spirit, some would say plague, of boosterism called "**Manifest Destiny**" convinced many Americans that the nation's God-given mission was to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Expansionism revived after the Civil War. Before the war, the

chants of "gold" reverberated from California back to the East Coast and thousands answered the call. California's white population exploded from 11,000 to more than 100,000 by 1852. Meanwhile California's Native American population plummeted due to disease and armed conflict. Just before the war in 1857, the discovery of the richest silver deposit in American history drew thousands to the **Comstock Lode** in Nevada and led quickly to Nevada statehood in 1864. Mining rushes continued across the West including to Colorado in the 1850s and Idaho and Montana in the 1860s and the Dakotas in the 1870s. Much like the first English colonists who founded Jamestown and landed in Massachusetts in the 17th century, the miners settled on the land without regard for the rights of the people already living on that land, American Indian peoples.

The **mining frontier** created urban settlements throughout the West as miners clustered in camps, often short-lived, wherever they found ore (such as gold, silver, or copper). Until now, we have looked at Europeans and Euro-Americans moving west across the continent. But with the mining frontier, after the California Gold Rush, people who rushed to California washed back from the west to the east and settled interior regions in the West.

Joining them were **Chinese** immigrants. Driven out of their homeland by severe famine and political turmoil and to California by the news of jobs and gold, 30,000 Chinese - mostly young men - immigrated to the Pacific Coast between 1850 and 1882. Many then signed up as contract laborers, agreeing to work four or five years in railroad construction without wages in return for their ocean passage. When their contracts expired, many followed the trails to mining camps. Wherever the Chinese lived, whites viewed them as competitors for jobs and when tensions heightened drove the Chinese out. In 1882 Congress passed the **Chinese Exclusion Act**, which suspended Chinese immigration,

limited the civil rights of Chinese already in the United States, and forbade the naturalization of resident Chinese.

By 1870, the US Census recognized and began to count Chinese in the United States. Below is a map prepared for the 1870 Census. In that year, more than half of Idaho's 6,579 miners were Chinese. Here you can see pockets of Chinese settlement, many in mountain mining areas.
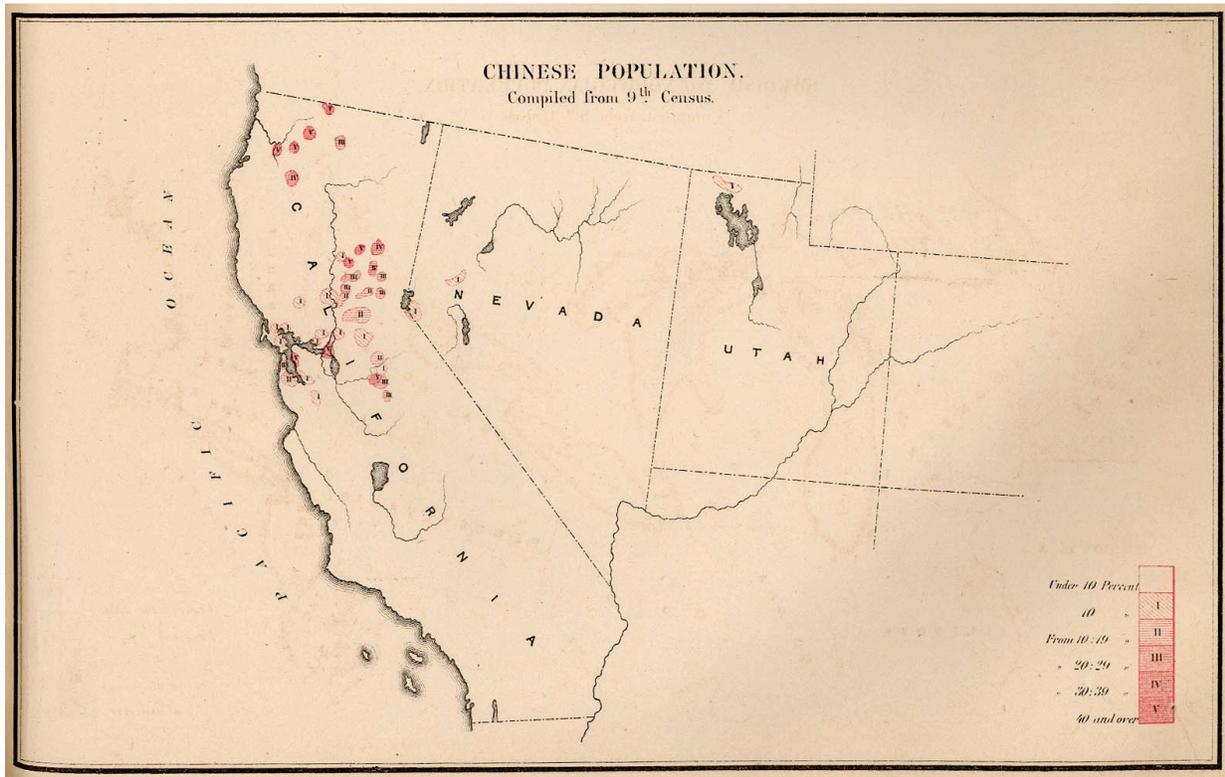
From *The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, Compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census, 1872. Image provided by Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Libraries (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/).

Farming Frontier

At the same time that gold seekers rushed to California, other

Euro-Americans traveled by wagon to claim land in Oregon Country and in Utah's Mormon settlements. From a trickle of migrants in 1840, the **Oregon Trail** had by 1860 borne 53,000 people who braved the trail's perils of disease, drought, mountain passes, and accidents to reach the Oregon country. Most journeyed in order to claim not ore but land on which they could farm and support their families. Thomas Jefferson envisioned the United States as a land of small farmers. Jefferson's vision combined with Manifest Destiny ideology inspired Congress during the Civil War to pass the **Homestead Act** to support small farms in the trans-Mississippi West.

Under the Homestead Act of 1862, any family head or adult male who was a citizen or had filed a declaration to become one could claim 160 acres of surveyed government (public domain) land with payment of a small registration fee (often $10) and the promise to live on those acres and farm them for 5 years. In the central and upper Midwest, the Homestead Act achieved its greatest success. Between 1863 and 1880, a little over half of the 242,000 new farms in Minnesota, Dakota Territory, Nebraska, and Kansas were filed under the Homestead Act provisions. But beyond the tall grass prairies that stretched into central Nebraska and Kansas along the 98th meridian of longitude and marked the transition into the semi-arid (20" rainfall) Great Plains, the Homestead Act failed for its 160 acres in arid land could not support a family. Later acts expanded the size of the homesteads but none addressed a **central problem** in the West - **water**.

Those who did not file homestead claims bought their land, often from the railroads who had received it for free from the federal government in land grants. Indeed railroad companies alone sold more land than the Homestead Act ever provided. Purchasing land and along with farming start-up costs plunged most farmers into debt. You read about tenant farming in the South by freed slaves. By 1880, the Census began to count tenant-operated

farms. In Nebraska, for example, 18 percent of the farms that year were operated by tenants and by 1890 nearly 25 percent were. By the turn of the 20th century, more than a third of all farmers in the United States worked as tenants. That was not Jefferson's vision.

The West grew dramatically after the Civil War. As the 20th century began, that growth continued. People leaving the Midwest and joined by European immigrants moved farther West into the High Plains and interior West. Nearly a million people, many of them farmers, migrated into Washington, Oregon, and Idaho between 1900 and 1910. Another million relocated to the High Plains of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas between 1900 and 1920. These migrants often took up the "surplus" land made available by **allotment** on Indian reservations.

To encourage these waves of migrants into the rural areas of the West, Congress passed an act in 1909 enlarging the homestead to 320 acres in the 12 western states. Coupling this act with a new system of dry-land farming resulted in 1909-10 becoming the year when the second highest number of acres were entered as homesteads. Despite the association of homesteading with the 19th century, more acres were given away in the first two decades of the 20th century than in the last three decades of the 19th (70 million from 1868 to 1897 versus 100 million from 1898 to 1917).

Extractive Industries

Your readings introduced you to the natural resources of the American West that attracted thousands of migrants. Mineral ores defined the **mining frontier** and arable land the **farming frontier**. The economy of the West depended on the extraction of natural resources and their export to the more populated areas of the

United States. By the late 19th century, the railroad allowed efficient transportation from west to east, but the West lacked the industrial development seen in manufacturing in the East. Instead of manufactured products, the railroads carried raw materials and agricultural productes from West to East. The West's reliance on extractive industries that employed unskilled and semi-skilled transient workers affected the characteristics of its labor movement and politics as we will see.

Below is yet another Google Docs Presentation - this one from my Pacific Northwest history class. We focused here on mining and farming, but this slideshow makes clear that logging and fishing were two other extractive industries of the West.
http://docs.google.com/Presentation?id=dcmgtzdx_27fr6d8gdq

Where Are We - American Indian Peoples

When Columbus landed in the Caribbean, as many as 15 million indigenous people lived in what would become the United States. By 1900, less than a quarter million remained and those few had been confined to ever shrinking reservations where they could no longer feed themselves through traditional subsistence practices. In the first decades of the new nation, the United States government formally recognized the **sovereignty of Indian nations** by signing treaties with them for land. These treaties, often revised by later versions, reduced Indian lands and confined Indians to reservations. By 1871, the federal government no longer regarded Indian peoples as nations to negotiate with. That year ended the treaty system and President Ulysses S. Grant inaugurated his **Peace Policy**. However one-sided the treaties may have been, the treaty process recognized Indian nations. By refusing to negotiate any other treaties, the federal government denied Indian nations their sovereignty. From this point on, federal Indian policy centered on forcing reservation Indians to abandon their traditional practices and become individual farmers

who could assimilate (disappear) into Euro-American society. The **Dawes Severalty (or General Allotment) Act of 1887** codified this policy when it allowed the president to distribute reservation land not to tribes but to individuals legally "severed" from their tribes. Those who met this standard could become citizens of the United States. The Dawes Act remained the keystone of federal Indian policy until the 1930s. It was not until 1924 that all American Indians were made United States citizens and not until 1934's Indian Reorganization Act that the destructive policies of the Dawes Act ended. You read about the devastating effects of federal Indian policy on Indian peoples.