Chapter 16 – Conquering a Continent (Post Civil War West)

The “Wild West” of the 20 years after the Civil War came to symbolize a place where individuals could re-invent themselves, where old rules did not apply, where violence was common, where a tough, independent risk taker could thrive and prosper.

This “Wild West” myth persists in modern popular culture (see images)...but it is a myth. What is the reality?

Westward Expansion: Crash Course US History #24
In preparation for an in class discussion, you are to take notes on the **Context**, **Purpose**, **Audience** and **Point of View** of the document. Also, research and take notes on some **Outside Knowledge** details relating to the topic.
Mythologizing of the West Begins almost immediately
Ex: Buffalo Bill Cody and his “Wild West Show” tours the world in the 1890’s
Reality is that despite “individualism” myth of the West, the Republican dominated federal government in the post Civil War era played a great role in promoting westward expansion with a variety of policies including:

- **Land Grants for the Transcontinental Railroad**
- **Homestead Act**
- **Protective Tariffs**
- **Anti-Indian Policies**
Simultaneous to Reconstruction in the South, the Civil War had delayed expansion into the Trans-Mississippi West. Growth of Railroads after the Civil War was crucial to expansion. The Western Frontier is closed by 1890.
Primary Source Reading – Western Historian (Frederick Jackson Turner)

Notes on Context, Purpose, Audience and Point of View

What are some Outside Knowledge details relating to topic?

Turners Frontier Hypothesis

Key ideas of Turner in his famous 1893 essay:

• West “Americanized” those on the frontier and enhanced values of: *individualism, innovation, upward mobility and democracy*

Later historiography criticizes Turner because he:

• Saw settlers as white males only
• Ignored government’s role in promoting expansion
Root of Conflict was “Ethnocentrism”

Definition: A belief in the inherent superiority your own ethnic group or culture. A tendency to judge other groups or cultures from your perspective only.

Terrible Impacts of Post Civil War Expansion on Native Americans of the West
Plains Indians & American Lifestyles Clash

Plains Indian Culture:
- Nomadic
- Communal
- In harmony with nature

American Culture:
- Values land ownership
- Values individual achievement
- Values “taming” nature
“Concentration” policy (begins in 1850’s) and resumes vigorously after Civil War. Federal government orders military to force western Indians onto reservations.
Custer’s “Last Stand” at the Little Big Horn in 1876
Hero or Villain? Changing historiography
Cartoon shows ethnocentric views toward Indians increased after Little Big Horn.

A TOUGH JOB FOR UNCLE SAM.

THE WEEDS ARE TALL AND THE SCythe IS SMALL.

Famous Examples of Plains Indian Resistance:

Famous Examples: Chief Joseph, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse & Geronimo
“Assimilation Policy” begins in 1870’s/80’s
Ex: Dawes Act

Tom Trlino, a Navajo Indian, photographed before and after his “assimilation.” Trlino attended the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania.
“Kill the Indian, save the man”

Ethnocentric assimilation policies
The “Battle” or “Massacre” at Wounded Knee, SD in 1890 signals end of Indian resistance on the Great Plains...becomes a symbolic place for Native peoples.
Primary Source Reading – Western Indian (Chief Joseph)

Notes on Context, Purpose, Audience and Point of View

What are some Outside Knowledge details relating to topic?
Republican pro creditor “tight” money policies with its reliance on currency backed by specie (gold & silver) and development of eastern factories (iron & lead) and new urban electricity (copper) creates demand for western metals & spurs mining boom. However, myth & reality again conflict as life for miners is difficult and most profits go to corporations in the East
A “hard rock” miner demonstrates the tiring and often dangerous task of hammering a drill into a rock to prepare a blasting hole. New technologies, such as diamond-headed drills, quickly revolutionized the extractive process, but potentially lethal hazards, including cave-ins and poisonous gases, remained great.
Environmental Impact Of Hydraulic Mining
Primary Source Reading – Western Miner (Mrs. Rachel Haskell)
Notes on Context, Purpose, Audience and Point of View

What are some Outside Knowledge details relating to topic?
Myths & Realities of Cowboy Life

Romanticized independence of the “Long Drives” & “Open Range” quickly replaced by barbed wire, railroads and low wages.
Racial diversity of the West different than that of the East
Primary Source Reading: Western Cowboy (James H. Cook)

Notes on Context, Purpose, Audience and Point of View

What are some Outside Knowledge details relating to topic?
R.R.’s were eager to sell federally granted western land to *Homesteaders* for low prices but shipping fees, loan fees, natural disasters & low crop prices soon put many farmers into major debt.
Myths & Realities of Plains Farmers. Life of the Sod Busting “Dry Farmer” is a difficult one…

**Primary Source Reading – Western Farmer** (Howard Ruede)

Notes on Context, Purpose, Audience and Point of View

What are some Outside Knowledge details relating to topic?