

## Part I: The Transformation of a Continent

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, people in the United States referred to the region west of the Mississippi River as “Indian Country.” In 1803, U.S. President Thomas Jefferson organized an expedition, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, to explore these western reaches of North America. Many in the United States believed it was the nation’s destiny to expand clear across the continent to the Pacific Ocean.

The Lewis and Clark expedition was an important step towards U.S. domination of much of the continent. Over the next fifty years, the United States would achieve its goal and reach the Pacific, taking more and more land from native groups through trade, treaties, and often through violence.

### *When did the history of the West begin?*

According to many traditional accounts, the history of the American West begins with the Lewis and Clark expedition. But human history in the region began thousands of years before the arrival of Lewis and Clark.

***“We have lived upon this land from days beyond history’s records, far past any living memory, deep into the time of legend. The story of my people and the story of this place are one single story.”***

—A Taos Pueblo elder

The lands that were new to Lewis and Clark were actually very old, populated by a series of societies, cultures, and communities over the course of thousands of years. Civilizations rose and fell here as they did in other parts of the world. At the same time the ancient civilizations of Rome and Greece were thriving in Europe, native societies were developing the western regions of North America. In 1250, the population of Cahokia, a city along the Mississippi River, may have been larger than that of London. Indian groups built great cities, developed intricate cultures

and religions, and adapted to changes brought on by environmental events and population shifts.

The West was a multicultural place long before Lewis and Clark arrived. Indian groups saw themselves as very different from each other, and rivalries and alliances fueled cooperation and conflict. Europeans were the latest newcomers in a long history of migration and change across this region. Indian societies adapted to the changes brought by Europeans as they had adapted to other changes in the past.

### Europeans and Western North America

Lewis and Clark made their trek from 1804 to 1806, but native groups west of the Mississippi felt the impact of newcomers in North America long before the expedition’s arrival. Compared to groups in the East, who faced wave after wave of British settlers, western groups had less contact with Europeans. There were French traders in the North and Spanish missionaries in the South, but these groups were not interested in settling large amounts of territory. Instead, they wanted resources and influence among local Indian groups. These Europeans had a strong impact on western groups. European diseases, religions, weapons, goods, and livestock all traveled along Indian trade networks and sparked significant changes among western Indian societies.

### *How did European horses, guns, and diseases change the West?*

While many of the things Europeans brought with them affected Indian societies, the three that caused the most profound changes were horses, guns, and disease.

The horse had been extinct in North America for thirteen thousand years when the Spanish arrived in present-day Mexico in the sixteenth century. At the time, most western Indian groups lived on the outskirts of the

Great Plains, an inhospitable land that people in the United States would later refer to as the “Great American Desert.” They foraged, fished, grew crops, and sometimes led hunting parties on foot into the Plains to hunt buffalo and other game. As Spanish colonists moved northward, the horse quickly made its way into the West—by trade and by theft—and revolutionized life on the Great Plains. The horse became a form of transport, a way to trade across large distances, and a weapon in war. Indians became skilled horse breeders and trainers, and soon were able to hunt buffalo in new and highly effective ways across ever-growing territories.

The horse encouraged some groups to completely change their ways of life. Groups like the Cheyenne gave up agriculture and divided into small bands. They moved onto the Plains and became nomads, migrating with the seasons to hunt buffalo and care for their horses. Groups like the Comanche that already relied on hunting could now hunt much more efficiently. Other groups continued to farm on the lands they had inhabited for generations but now, hunting on horseback, they could

kill an abundance of game. It was a time of great prosperity for societies that hunted on the Plains, as they were able to get their food, clothing, tools, weapons, and bedding from the plentiful buffalo herds.

It was also a time of growing conflict. Horses allowed Indian groups to lay claim to vast areas, and groups increasingly clashed over territory and resources. They also clashed with Spanish settlements in the south. Guns made these conflicts ever more deadly. Guns and horses became necessary for survival in this new, volatile world, and Indian rivals fought for access to these goods.

The same trade networks that carried horses, guns, and other European goods through the West also spread European diseases. Smallpox, chicken pox, cholera, measles, and other illnesses took a devastating toll on Nnative societies. New epidemics killed anywhere from 15 to 90 percent of the populations they infected. For example, the Omaha Indians, who lived near the Missouri River in what is today Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota, had a population of as many as three thousand towards the end of the eighteenth

century. By 1802, after a deadly smallpox epidemic, they numbered just three hundred.

The Omaha experience was not unique. Indian groups in North America had no previous exposure to these diseases and so had no natural immunity. Groups across the continent suffered immeasurable loss as their populations were decimated by disease. Powerful tribes were reduced to mere fractions of their original numbers. Survivors struggled to recover socially and politically as well as emotionally.



Wikimedia Commons.

This drawing, from a 16th century manuscript created by a Spanish friar, shows a Nahua Indian in Central America suffering from smallpox. European disease devastated Indian populations throughout the Americas.

**“What little we could spare we offered to the Bad Spirit to let us alone and go to our enemies. To the Good Spirit we offered feathers, branches of trees, and sweet smelling grass. Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people.”**

—Saukamappee, a Cree Indian, recounting a 1781 smallpox epidemic in his community

With small populations, groups could not defend themselves or their territories. Sometimes small bands of survivors from different groups joined together, but this could lead to problems of leadership and authority. Groups that were divided into small, mobile bands, such as the Apache and Comanche, tended to be less susceptible to devastating population loss than groups settled in large, farming communities. New groups rose to power in the wake of massive population change.

### Cultural Differences and Misunderstandings

Cultural differences between Indians and Europeans were widespread, both in the West and the East. These differences caused confusion, affected the way groups related to each other, and even led to conflict. Here are examples of some important differences in the ways these groups understood their interactions.

**Trade:** Most Indian groups understood trade to be an exchange of gifts to make or keep alliances and friendships. By contrast, Europeans believed the primary purpose of trade was to make a profit. For some, like the French, trade and profit were the main goals of settlement in North America. The goods Europeans offered encouraged Indians to value trade for its material gains. One effect was increased Indian hunting for pelts to trade, which depleted game stocks and diverted resources from Indian communities to European traders. Trade also made Indian societies dependent on the goods they could get from Europeans—not only guns and horses, but also cloth, tools, and alcohol.

**Land:** Indian groups and Europeans also viewed the land differently. While Indian groups had ties to specific territories for cultural, spiritual, and economic reasons—and in many cases fought to defend their claims to that land—they did not believe the land was something to be owned in the sense of buying and selling. Europeans, and the British in particular, insisted on owning land. They made land into a commodity that could be bought, sold, stolen, or signed over in treaties.

**Treaties:** Treaties were often a source of cultural misunderstanding. In many cases, European groups assumed the treaties they signed applied to whole Indian nations or multiple nations across a particular region. But often, the Indians who signed treaties believed they were only signing for their own bands or communities. In addition, Europeans believed that the result of the treaty negotiations was the document that was signed at the end. Native Americans, for their part, believed what was said at the meeting was more important than what was written down. In many cases, Europeans exploited this cultural difference and the language barrier by giving themselves far greater gains in the document than what had been discussed at the negotiations.

**“We have often seen (and you know it to be true) that the White people by the help of their paper (which we don’t understand) claim Lands from us very unjustly and carry them off.”**

—Iroquois Indian to Sir William Johnson, British Indian superintendent, in 1769, as recounted by Johnson

***How did Indians and Europeans interact?***

As Indian societies adapted to the new environment created by diseases, horses, guns, and other European goods, they also interacted with European people in a variety of ways. For western groups, the nearest European settlements were the French in the north and the Spanish in the south. Some groups formed alliances with Europeans to gain power. By establishing trading relationships, Indian groups could gain access to goods—like guns and horses—that brought them power. In addition, having military alliances with Europeans could strengthen a group’s position against its adversaries. Weaker groups could make new allies against their enemies; groups that were powerful suddenly faced rivals for power. Some groups led raids against European settlements to steal livestock, guns, and other goods. Others tried to avoid any contact with Europeans.

Europeans had their own reasons for building relationships with Indians. Indian allies made trade possible. This was important both to send goods back to Europe, and to gain supplies for the European settlements in North America. Alliances with Indian groups also gave a military boost to these small European outposts, helping them challenge their European rivals on the North American continent and defend against Indian enemies. At the time, both France and Spain had colonial empires stretching through large parts of the Americas.

Just as Indians adapted to the changes brought about by Europeans, European settlers had to adapt to the “new world” they found themselves in. Indians played an important role helping Europeans navigate this new environment. Indians introduced new foods, showed them how to access the supplies they



As horses spread across the Plains in the eighteenth century, they became integral parts of many Indian societies. This image shows A’aninin people in the early twentieth century. The A’aninin lived in present-day Montana and North Dakota.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Edward S. Curtis Collection, LC-USZ62-48422.

needed, and acted as guides and interpreters in a physical and cultural landscape that was completely foreign. With few European women in these settlements, many settlers married Indian women. Some joined Indian tribes, and some Indians joined European settlements.

***How did some groups oppose the changes brought by Europeans?***

Indian groups interacted with Europeans and adapted to the changes brought by their arrival on the continent, but they did not completely transform their societies to follow European models. Instead, they adopted what fit well with their existing values and practices—for example growing European crops that could extend the growing season—and ignored the parts of European society that did not.

In some cases, Europeans forced their values on Indian groups. For example, throughout their colony of New Spain (present-day Mexico, Central America, and the U.S. southwest), the Spanish established missions, or settlements aimed at educating Indians and converting them to Catholicism. Spanish missionaries encouraged converts to raise European livestock, grow European crops, and practice European trades. The Spanish kept their converts on the missions by threat of force.

While many groups initially accepted elements of Spanish society, the costs for some, like the Pueblos in present-day New Mexico, soon became too great. The Spanish demanded labor and resources from the Pueblos, and outlawed their religion. In addition, at least seventeen-thousand Pueblos died from European diseases in the seventeenth century alone.

In 1680, Pueblos in more than two-dozen towns rose up against the Spanish. Within a few weeks, the Pueblos had killed or frightened off all the Spanish people in New Spain's province of New Mexico. Some Pueblo leaders called on their people to reject all things Spanish, but most Pueblos continued to use European goods and technologies that improved their daily lives. The Spanish retook the region in the 1690s and allied with the Pueblos in order to oppose other, stronger enemies like the Apache and the Comanche.

## U.S. Westward Expansion

As these changes were transforming the West, the British settled more and more territory in the East, causing far-reaching changes among Indian societies there. In 1776, these British settlers rose up against Britain and declared themselves an independent nation, founded on the ideals of personal liberty and individual rights. The leaders of this new country believed that their nation was exceptional. They wanted it to be a beacon of liberty in a world of European empire, tyranny, and oppression. The new country's treatment of native people would contrast sharply with the ideals it set for itself.

### *Why did U.S. leaders believe the United States should expand westward?*

Since their arrival on the continent, British settlers had taken land from Indians—by trade, treaty, trickery, and violence. As the colonies grew, they took more and more land for their growing populations. The American Revolution was fought, in part, because the British government put limits on the expansion of the colonies. During the war, most Native Ameri-

can groups in the East joined the side of the British in the hopes of limiting the expansion of the settlers. After the war, the United States claimed the lands of all Indians who had fought against them.

Many early U.S. leaders believed that land ownership was key to preserving liberty and equality among the nation's white men. Some, like Thomas Jefferson, argued that the nation needed to be built on the backs of small farmers in order to prevent the rise of oppressive landlords. With a growing population, this would require more and more land.

U.S. leaders believed their system of representative government and individual land ownership was the highest form of civilization and superior to every other system that existed. As the nineteenth century progressed, this national identity became linked to Anglo Americans' belief in their own racial superiority. (Anglo Americans are white, English-speaking residents of the United States.) Supporters of expansion argued that the United States was a chosen land and Anglo Americans were a people chosen to bring "civilization"—in the form of Christianity, representative government, and land ownership—to the people of color that lived across North and Latin America. People in the United States used this ideology of racial superiority to justify the violent dispossession of Native Americans and the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of Africans and African Americans across much of the new nation. (Dispossession is taking away something people own, typically land or property.)

As the country's national identity developed, some people began to believe it was the United States' destiny to expand across the continent. Many of them were ardent Christians and believed that this was a destiny that God had ordained for the country. The term "manifest destiny" was coined in the 1840s to describe this idea.

***“The American claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and possess the whole of the***

*continent which Providence [God] has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self-government entrusted to us.”*

—John O’Sullivan,  
editor and columnist, 1845

### **Why was there disagreement within the United States about westward expansion?**

Proponents argued that expansion would unite the country and lead to great economic growth. The country would widen its agricultural base and tap new natural resources. But not everyone believed that the United States should expand beyond its current boundaries. Some leaders argued that it was unconstitutional—there was no provision in the Constitution about incorporating new territory into the Union. They worried that unchecked expansion would divide the nation, stretch the country’s limited resources too far, and create a dispersed and ungovernable population. With British, French, and Spanish settlements along U.S. borders, it could also spark an international war.

As politicians debated the merits and legality of expansion, ordinary citizens in the frontiers continued to push the U.S. border westward. By expanding their homesteads and letting their livestock graze on Indian lands, they persisted in pushing Indian groups off their lands. Population pressure also contributed to the demand for more land. Between 1776 and 1850, the U.S. population nearly doubled every twenty-five years. There were economic incentives as well. Farmers in the South began to specialize in lucrative crops such as cotton, which could be sold internationally. With slavery legal in that part of the

country, they could make huge profits as they expanded their plantations across more and more land.

### **What was the Louisiana Purchase?**

Even as the country debated westward expansion, its leaders faced situations that forced them to make decisions about the country’s future. Spain, France, Britain, and Russia still had claims to large sections of North America, including the city of New Orleans—an essential port for U.S. farmers along the Mississippi River. The U.S. government was fearful that its access to this port would be restricted when Spain transferred the region to France in 1800. In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson sent diplomats to offer France up to \$2 million for New Orleans and West Florida. But France, eager to pull out of its failing North American empire, surprised the U.S. delegates with a counteroffer: for \$15 million the United States would gain the Louisiana Territory, more than 800,000 square miles of land. This would extend the U.S. western border from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and double the size of the country.

The Louisiana Purchase gave the United States control of the Mississippi River. It also opened new lands for U.S. settlement. These lands had been sparsely settled by the Spanish and French, and had remained largely in the control of Native American groups. In the early nineteenth century, thousands of U.S. settlers, eager for land, descended upon Louisiana.

What France sold to the United States was its claim to the Louisiana Territory. In the halls of Europe, the United States was recognized as the owner of these lands. But to the thousands

## **U.S. Expansion Beyond Mainland North America**

In the nineteenth century, it was not clear that the Pacific Ocean was the endpoint of U.S. expansion. In the 1820s, the U.S. government discussed annexing the Spanish Caribbean colony of Cuba, and in the 1850s there was talk of annexing what is today the Dominican Republic. U.S. interests in the Caribbean led to the Spanish-American War in 1898. The United States occupied Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico at the end of the war—Puerto Rico is still a U.S. territory today.

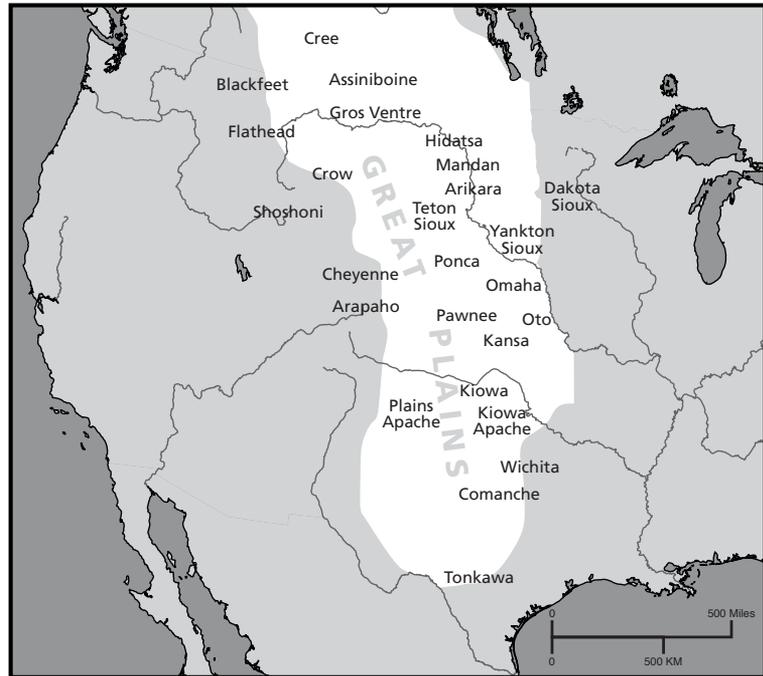
of Native Americans that lived there, U.S. claims were meaningless. Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States would fight more than fifty wars and negotiate with dozens of Indian groups for the sale of Indian lands in Louisiana.

### **Why was the Lewis and Clark expedition significant?**

At the same time Jefferson sent delegates to buy New Orleans from France, he began preparations for an expedition to explore the western part of the continent. The main objectives of the Lewis and Clark expedition were economic. Jefferson wanted to establish relationships with Indian groups in the northwest to give the United States a share in the fur trade there. He also hoped to find a water route across the continent so that the United States could more efficiently reach Chinese markets in the Pacific.

When Lewis and Clark crossed the continent, they passed through lands that had experienced profound upheaval in the previous two centuries. They met Indian people who rode horses, wore European-style clothing, could speak some French or English, drank alcohol imported from Europe, and bore the marks of smallpox. They also passed village after empty village, symbols of the devastation that European diseases wrought on Indian societies.

Lewis and Clark did not find a water route across North America, but they did build relationships with a number of Indian groups in the West. Most Indian groups believed that these U.S. citizens would be like the Europeans who came before them—interested in trade rather than settlement. But the arrival of U.S. citizens in the West marked a new era. For people in the United States, the Lewis and Clark expedition shifted the idea of “the West” westward. As U.S. citizens settled further and further inland, they began to view the lands



The lands that Lewis and Clark traveled were far from empty. Indian groups lived throughout the continent in the early 1800s. This map shows the location of Indian groups who lived or hunted on the Great Plains in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

west of the Mississippi as “the West”—and as ripe for U.S. expansion.

### **Why was the War of 1812 a turning point in U.S.-Indian relations?**

Prior to the American Revolution, the British had claimed a region to the west of the thirteen colonies called the Northwest Territory—a region that today is comprised of the states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and part of Minnesota. After the war, the United States claimed this territory as its own. But Britain, with colonies in Canada, continued to ally with Indian groups in the Northwest Territory. British leaders hoped to keep the United States from expanding too close to Canada’s borders. Despite U.S. attempts to settle the area and its incorporation of the state of Ohio in 1803, Native American groups, with the support of the British, refused to give up their lands.

**“Brothers; —Money, to us, is of no value, & to most of us unknown,**

*and...no consideration whatever can induce us to sell the lands on which we get sustenance for our women and children.... We desire you to consider Brothers, that our only demand, is the peaceable possession of a small part of our once great Country. Look back and view the lands from whence we have been driven to this spot, we can retreat no further, because the country behind hardly affords food for its present inhabitants. And we have therefore resolved, to leave our bones in this small space, to which we are now confined.”*

—Delegates from a number of Indian groups in the Northwest Territory to U.S. commissioners, 1793

In 1812, the United States went to war with Britain and Britain’s Native American allies. The War of 1812 raged for three years, with neither side gaining an advantage. But after the war, the British agreed to give up its alliances with Native American groups in the Northwest Territory in return for U.S. promises not to expand into Canada.

This treaty signaled not only the end of British support for tribes in the Ohio region,

but also the end of European support for Native American groups opposing U.S. expansion. The United States had sent a clear signal about its strength and intentions to the European powers on the continent. From this point onward, Europe did not challenge U.S. expansion in North America. Indian groups were alone in their struggles to halt U.S. growth.

U.S. resolve was made clear a decade later in President James Monroe’s 1823 State of the Union address. The president warned European countries against interfering in the Americas outside of their present colonies. He stated that the United States would see any future European involvement in the region would be seen as an act of aggression.

Some historians argue that this policy, which became known as the Monroe Doctrine, was needed to protect the security of the infant nation. But others argue that it was aimed at removing any European opposition to U.S. expansion.

## Indian Removal

One of the major questions facing the United States in its first century was how it would treat the Indian groups in North America. This included not only groups in the West, but also the thousands of Native Americans that lived within U.S. borders at the time.

In the early nineteenth century, the federal government supported a policy of assimilation. This policy encouraged Indian groups to become “civilized” by adopting Anglo-American customs, converting to Christianity, and becoming small farmers. U.S. leaders wanted Indian groups to give up their lands and become part of U.S. society.

**“[I]n preparing them ultimately**



National Archives, 111-5C-89608.

In this photo from 1895, a family poses outside a log cabin in the New Mexico Territory. The sitting woman is an Indian servant. While many Indian people worked for U.S. settlers throughout the nineteenth century, enslavement of Native Americans was also common before the Civil War.

***to participate in the benefits of our Government, I trust and believe we are acting for their greatest good.”***

—President Thomas Jefferson,  
January 18, 1803

At the same time, the U.S. demand for land was strong. U.S. leaders were under pressure to open new lands for settlement quickly, which ran counter to the slow process of assimilation. Some U.S. leaders began to talk about moving Indian communities that were in or near U.S. states to regions west of the Mississippi River. President Thomas Jefferson supported the purchase of Louisiana in part because he believed that Indian groups located in the United States could move there, opening local Indian lands for white agriculture and commerce.

### ***How did Indian groups respond to U.S. assimilation policies?***

The U.S. government’s policy of assimilation went hand in hand with attempts to take more land from Indian communities. Many Indian groups resisted the encroachment of white settlers. Tenskwatawa was one religious and political leader who was an outspoken critic of assimilation. Tenskwatawa was a member of the Shawnee people, who were located across present-day Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, and Indiana. Tenskwatawa, who became known as the Prophet, attracted a large following by encouraging people to reject European and U.S. goods and revive Indian customs. Many of his followers had begun to see themselves as “Indians,” despite their diverse clan and tribe affiliations, in opposition to the newcomers that threatened their traditional lands and ways of life.

Other groups found that it benefitted them to adopt some elements of Anglo-American culture. For example, during the 1820s, the Cherokees in Georgia created a republic modeled on the government of the United States. Cherokee farmers participated in the booming cotton economy and some even had African American slaves to work their plantations. In

1827, the Cherokee nation adopted a written constitution and declared itself an independent nation. This greatly angered Anglo Americans in Georgia because they wanted Cherokee land for their plantations.

Even in areas where Indian groups attempted to assimilate, there were no protections for Indians under U.S. or state laws. Indians were not accorded the same rights as whites. Indian law was not respected, even in areas that Indians controlled. For example, Georgia established a special police force to enforce Georgian laws on Cherokee lands. Furthermore, in the minds of U.S. policy makers, there were limits to assimilation. The U.S. government did not see the Cherokee nation as a success story of assimilation. U.S. leaders wanted Indian groups to adopt U.S. customs, but they ultimately intended for Indian groups to give up their cultural and political independence—and their land.

### ***What was the Indian Removal Act?***

Much of the white population in the South felt threatened by the federal government’s policy of assimilation. For one, it meant that the lands they wanted would continue to be held by Indians. In addition, most Anglo Americans subscribed to the ideas that Indians were racially inferior and incapable of being “civilized.”

Despite previous treaties with Indian groups in the southeast, U.S. leaders gave in to the demands of land speculators, miners in search of precious minerals, and white settlers. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson, a Southern politician who was a strong advocate of Indian removal, signed the Indian Removal Act into law. This act called on any Indians residing in U.S. states or territories to move west of the Mississippi River. In treaties signed with eastern Indian groups, the United States designated new lands for them in the West and offered compensation for the move. In total, the U.S. government’s actions led to about 125,000 people moving west, the majority from communities in southern states.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-7122.



Hydraulic mining is a type of mining that uses high-pressure jets of water to erode rock. Hydraulic mining was popular among gold miners in California in the 1850s and 1860s, and had a negative impact on the environment. This photograph was taken in Nevada County, California in 1866.

***“It must be obvious to you...that to continue where you are, within the territorial limits of an independent state, can promise you nothing but interruption and disquietude. Beyond the Mississippi your prospects will be different.... The United States will be able to say to you...in the language of your own nation, the soil shall be yours while the trees grow, or the streams run.”***

—Secretary of War John Eaton in a letter to a Cherokee delegation, April 1829

There were many people in the United States, Indians and non-Indians alike, that voiced strong opposition to Indian removal. They argued that it was both immoral and illegal according to prior treaties. While some groups, like the Choctaws, moved west with little resistance, other groups violently resisted U.S. attempts to take over their lands. The Seminoles successfully fought the U.S. Army and remained in southern Florida. (Another war in the 1850s forced many—but not

all—Seminoles westward.) Some Indian groups appealed to the Supreme Court or refused to sign removal treaties with the U.S. government. The Cherokees, for their part, worked to convince the U.S. government to grant them U.S. citizenship. The government refused, and in 1838 issued an ultimatum: if the Cherokees did not move west immediately, they would be forced to leave. In what became known as the Trail of Tears, federal troops forced Cherokee communities to leave their lands and, in the dead of winter, escorted them west of the Mississippi. Of the 15,000 Cherokee people who made the journey, more than 4,000 died from disease, exposure, and malnutrition.

## New Settlers in the West

Eastern Indian groups moved west to lands already populated by other Indian groups. The new arrivals faced hostility and resentment from those who already lived there. They struggled to put their lives back together after leaving everything back east. Over time these transplants reestablished their governments, towns, schools, churches, and farms. They also introduced ideas from U.S. society—representative government, slave-based agriculture, and Christianity—to groups in the West.

The federal government settled the eastern tribes in a region that became known as Indian Territory. At first, this area took up the majority of the Louisiana Territory. The U.S. government believed it was giving this land to the tribes permanently. As U.S. settlers moved west, they bypassed the region for places like Oregon, Texas, and California. But it quickly became clear that U.S. demand for land would not stop at Indian Territory’s borders. As more settlers arrived in the West, they encroached further on Indian lands, blatantly violating

the treaties and promises the government had made with these groups.

### ***Why did people in the United States want to settle in the West?***

People in the United States moved west for a variety of reasons but the one, overriding draw that the West offered was opportunity. There was rich, fertile land for farming, great forests full of timber, and a wealth of mineral resources to be discovered. Farmers from the East, frustrated with poor soil quality or hoping to establish farms in areas better connected to transportation, moved west in droves. In many cases, they occupied Indian lands before the federal government had negotiated with the Indian groups that lived there. Doctors, lawyers, preachers, politicians, and others followed close behind to establish towns and communities in these territories.

One factor that encouraged people to move westward was the dramatic growth in U.S. population in the first part of the nineteenth century. The United States grew from a country of 7.25 million in 1812 to more than 23 million people in 1852. Much of this growth was due to an upsurge in immigration from Europe. These immigrants all hoped to participate in what they saw as the promise

of America—a promise symbolized by the western frontier. A significant portion of western migrants in the nineteenth century were first-generation immigrants from places like Ireland, Germany, Sweden, and Norway.

Others found different kinds of opportunity in the West. For example, the Mormons who settled in Utah wanted freedom from persecution for their religious beliefs. The West provided social opportunity for some. In 1869, the Wyoming Territory granted women the right to vote, the first place in the United States to do so. Initially, the West also provided opportunities for free African Americans and other people of color. But as more Anglo Americans settled westward, they brought the discriminatory policies of the East along with them. Mexican and Chinese immigrants faced similar discrimination when they participated in the mineral rushes of the far west, such as the California Gold Rush of 1848.

### ***How did Indian groups respond to these migrants?***

Initially, most Indian groups did not see these new settlers as a significant threat. As lines of wagons traced their way across the continent, Indian groups often helped travel-

## **U.S. Settlement and the Environment**

The West was not an untouched wilderness when Europeans arrived. But the arrival of Europeans encouraged alteration and exploitation of the natural environment on an unprecedented scale.

Long before U.S. settlers moved into the region, the fur trade had encouraged over-hunting and led to the near-collapse of many species, including sea otters and beavers. The influx of U.S. settlers to the West brought a new wave of environmental change. Settlers built roads, homes, and communities. They fenced off land and constructed farms and ranches. Buffalo, deer, and elk had to compete with cattle and other livestock for grazing lands. Ranching led to overgrazing, vegetation loss, and erosion. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, new technologies like mechanical harvesters, the John Deere plow, and barbed wire helped settlers transform the once open and grassy plains into fenced, profitable farmland.

Other economic activity affected the environment in different, but equally profound ways. The growth of cities and towns required lumber, and wood was the fuel that powered the railroads. Large-scale logging operations devastated western forests. Similarly, the gold rush that began in California in 1848 led to massive erosion and destruction as companies blasted riverbanks apart in search of gold.

ers find water holes, traded food supplies, and guided settlers across the unfamiliar terrain.

But the scope and speed of U.S. settlement in the West soon made it clear that this influx of whites was different from the ones that came before. According to the first federal census in 1790, fewer than 100,000 U.S. citizens lived west of the Appalachian Mountains. Fifty years later, more than seven million people lived in the West—more than 40 percent of the entire U.S. population.

Most settled in places like Texas, California, and the Oregon Territory. But even in areas that whites merely traveled through, they brought disease, depleted timber stocks, hunted and frightened away game, and allowed their livestock to graze Indian crops and the grasses that fed Indian horses.

***“This country was once covered with buffalo, elk, deer, and antelope, and we had plenty to eat. But now, since the white man has made a road across our land and has killed off our game, we are hungry and there is nothing left for us to eat. Our women and children cry for food and we have no food to give them.”***

—Washakie, a Shoshoni chief, 1855

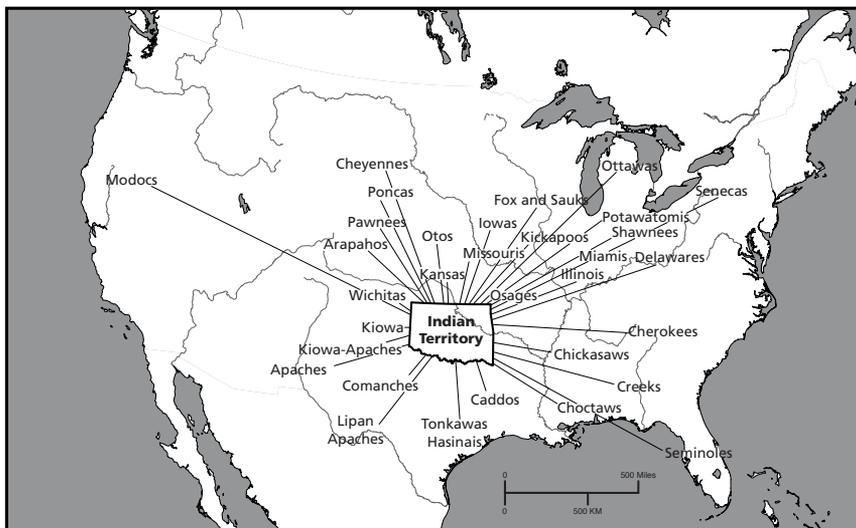
Tensions between whites and Indians grew as Indian groups began to see the newcomers as intruders.

***Why was there violence in the West in the second half of the nineteenth century?***

As the pace of U.S. migration westward increased, it became clear that the United States would not honor its commitments to preserve Indian lands. In the 1850s, the U.S. government opened up territory in Kansas and Nebraska to settlement. In the land runs that followed, settlers, land speculators, and lumberjacks arrived in droves and murdered any Indians who tried to defend their lands. By the 1860s, Indian Territory had shrunk to an area that today makes up part of Oklahoma.

Remaining Indian lands in other parts of the West were under siege from settlers, miners, and railroad companies. In the 1850s, the United States signed a number of treaties with Indian groups for the right to establish roads and posts on Indian lands that settlers were crossing on their way further west. But as the first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, bringing ever-more settlers, troops, and supplies westward, it seemed apparent that treaties alone would not slow U.S. encroachment on Indian lands.

Local conflicts erupted between Indian groups and white settlers. The U.S. government sent troops to quell the violence. The government aimed to subdue the region and make it safe and available for white settlement. But it faced opposition on a number of fronts. For example, powerful groups like the Comanche and Lakota were in the midst of their own territorial expansion and fiercely resisted U.S. expansion in their territories. Other groups, like the Apache and Navajo,



By the 1860s, U.S. settlement had forced Indian Territory to shrink drastically. This map shows the Indian groups that resided in Indian Territory and where they lived before they moved there.



National Archives, 49-AR-32.

Land runs were one method used by the government to settle lands across the West. Hordes would arrive from the East, and on a given day, U.S. officials would give a signal and the settlers and speculators would make a mad dash to claim plots of land. On September 16, 1893 the U.S. government organized a land run like this in Oklahoma Territory, opening 7 million acres of land it had purchased from the Cherokees in Indian Territory. It was the largest land run in U.S. history. In this photo, men line up at the land office in Oklahoma on September 23, 1893 to file their land claims.

stole livestock, food, and weapons from white settlements.

Groups across the region fought against U.S. attempts to take their lands. For example, from 1866 to 1867 an alliance of Lakotas, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapahos faced off against the U.S. military in what became known as Red Cloud's War. These groups wanted to close the Bozeman Trail, a route in Wyoming that was used by miners, settlers, and others to reach the Montana gold fields. In the Sioux War of 1876, the Lakotas and Northern Cheyenne fought to keep the U.S. government from taking over the Black Hills, a sacred Lakota site where white settlers had discovered gold. In this war, the U.S. military was supported by the Crow and Shoshoni, longtime enemies of the Lakota.

## Increasing Tensions and Evolving Policies

U.S. expansion had important repercussions not only for native groups and the environment (see box on page 13), but for U.S. politics as well. The rapid growth of the

country—and in particular the incorporation of new states and territories—created a deep divide in U.S. politics. This division was regional, with politicians in the South and North pitted against each other. Leaders in these regions increasingly had different visions for the future of the United States.

### *How did westward expansion increase sectional tensions in the United States?*

At the root of the issue was slavery. States in the North had begun to emancipate slaves as early as the 1770s, although in most cases this emancipation took place slowly. The North's rapidly growing economy was based on small farms, industry, transportation, and trade. In the South, where slavery remained widespread, the economy was based on large-scale agriculture. As the country expanded westward, new states joined the Union as either free or slave states. The North and the South competed to gain new states to boost their power in Congress. With control of Congress, states could pass legislation to further their economic interests.

Each new state entering the Union became a flashpoint of tension between North and South. For example, in 1819 Missouri petitioned Congress to enter the Union as a slave state. At the time, the U.S. Senate was equally balanced with eleven slave states and eleven free states. The entry of Missouri would give Southern states an advantage. In what became known as the Missouri Compromise, Missouri entered the Union as a slave state at the same time that Maine entered as a free state. But this compromise only eased tensions temporarily. By the 1840s, the threat of national division was real. Both abolitionists (people advocating for the end of slavery) and slaveholders understood the West as the critical battleground for the future of slavery.

### ***What were the results of the Mexican-American War?***

Despite the strain on U.S. politics, the country continued to expand westward. In the 1820s, U.S. settlers began moving into Texas, a territory in northern Mexico. The Mexican government had encouraged U.S. settlement as a way of boosting its sparse settlements there. Mexico's leaders hoped the increase in population would deter attacks by raiding Indian groups like the powerful Comanche. They also hoped to discourage the United States from expanding its national borders to include Texas. But in 1836 Mexico's plan backfired when Texas declared independence. Although the United States was deeply divided over whether to admit Texas—a slave territory—into the Union, the territory was annexed as a U.S. state in 1845.

As many had feared, the entry of Texas into the United States sparked a crisis with Mexico. In 1846, Mexico and the United States went to war. U.S. troops dominated the fight, pushing Mexican armies back on every front. The United States invaded its southern neighbor and took over Mexico City in just over a year.

There was sharp disagreement in the United States over the war. Many in the North believed that Southern politicians had initiated the war to add more slave territory to the

Union. And in fact, some ardent expansionists called for the United States to take over all of Mexico. Others opposed the war because they did not want to incorporate Mexico's non-white populations into the United States. Still others argued that the politicians who supported the war were interested in building a U.S. empire—an idea that many felt ran counter to U.S. ideals and values.

In two years of fighting, at least twenty thousand Mexicans and thirteen thousand U.S. troops were killed. U.S. soldiers committed many atrocities against Mexicans during the invasion. At the end of the war in 1848, the United States won 1.2 million square miles of territory—what would eventually become California, Nevada, Utah, some of Colorado and Wyoming, and most of Arizona and New Mexico. This land transfer reduced Mexico nearly by half. Among Mexicans, the atrocities of the war and the humiliation of territorial loss created a lasting sense of resentment towards the United States.

***“[O]ur history is written simply by saying that Mexico and the United States are neighbors. At least France and England are separated by the Channel; between our nation and our neighbor there exists no other border than a simple mathematical line... God help the Republic!”***

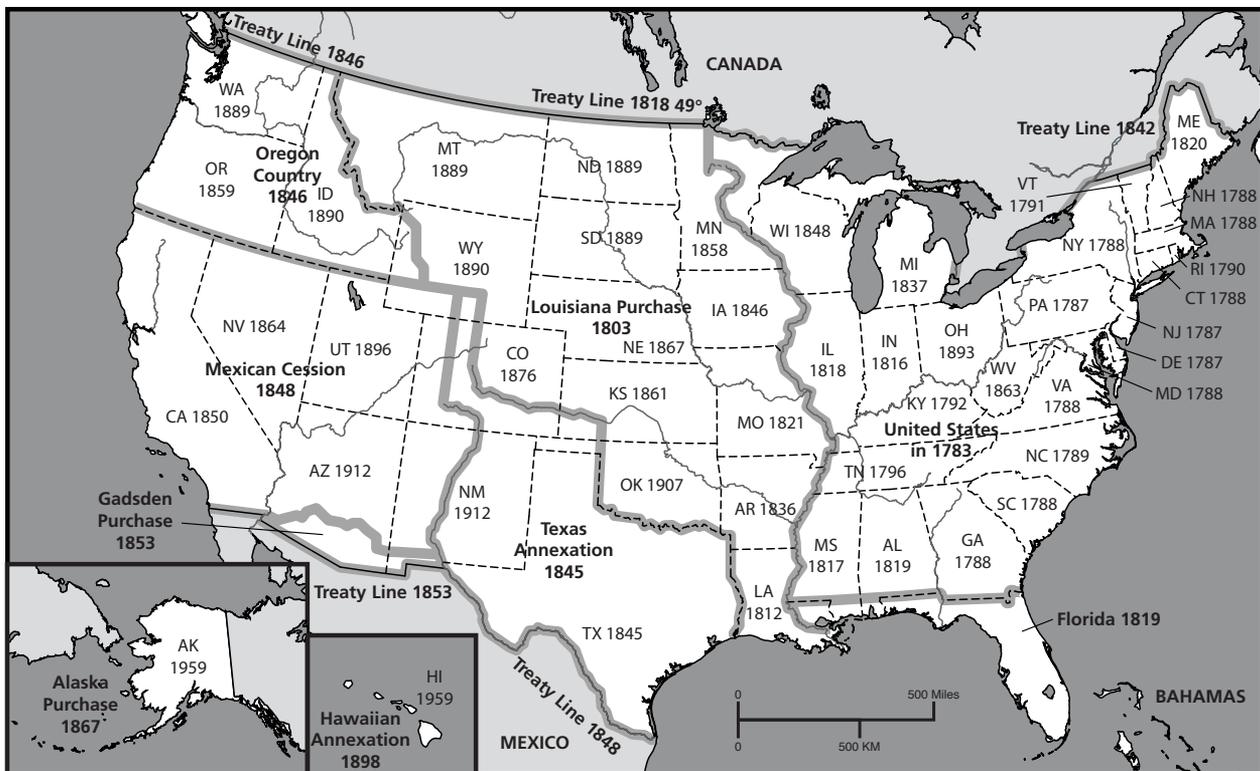
—Antonio García Cubas, Mexican cartographer, 1847

In 1853, the United States negotiated further gains from Mexico in the Gadsden Purchase. In exchange for \$10 million, the United States got a strip of land along the Gila River in northern Mexico to build a southern transcontinental railroad.

### ***How did westward expansion help spark the U.S. Civil War?***

The new territories acquired in the Mexican-American War inflamed tensions over slavery's expansion and deepened the chasm that existed between slave and free states. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected president

## The Progression of U.S. Expansion



without the support of a single slave state. Within weeks, South Carolina had seceded, or split from, the Union. The following year, six more southern states joined South Carolina in the Confederate States of America.

The U.S. Civil War raged from 1861 to 1865. Confederate forces from the South fought for independence, while Union forces from the North went to war to keep the country united.

The war was not isolated in the East. Both sides sought allies among western states and territories, and also among western Indian groups. In Indian Territory, groups were sharply divided over the war. Some, including slaveholders and those who bitterly remembered the federal government's removal policies, supported the Confederacy. Others remembered the brutality and injustice of Southern states during removal and supported the Union. Indian Territory became the scene of many bloody battles, as groups there fought to control the region.

The federal government withdrew many of its troops from the West to fight in the war. With limited defenses, many western settlers panicked, fearing that Indian groups would take the opportunity to attack. In 1864, a Colorado Territory militia attacked a group of Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes who had recently made peace with federal officials. In what became known as the Sand Creek Massacre, the militia murdered dozens of people, many of them women and children. Many historians believe that Colorado's authorities were deliberately trying to start a large-scale war with Indian groups in order to prevent further federal troop withdrawals. The attack drove many peaceful Cheyennes and Arapahoes to join military groups to oppose the United States.

In 1865, Northern troops emerged victorious and forced the southern states back into the Union. The federal government abolished slavery throughout the United States and all its territories. After the war, the government, hoping to unite the country with a common

goal, turned its attention to conquering the West.

***How did U.S. territorial growth lead to a change in U.S. Indian policy?***

At the end of the Civil War, the government reassessed its policy towards Native Americans. With U.S. expansion clear across the continent, removing Indians beyond the borders of white settlement was no longer an option. As violence in the West intensified in the mid-nineteenth century, a few had begun to advocate for extermination. Others believed that, while distasteful, the extinction of North America's Indian groups was inevitable in the face of U.S. strength and superiority. Still others criticized the government for its inhumane treatment of Indian groups, and urged it to craft a policy based on justice and compassion. Many of these reformers were former abolitionists.

***“[N]ext to the crime of slavery the foulest blot on the escutcheon [character] of the Government of the United States is the treatment of the so-called ‘Wards of the Nation.’ The crimes against the Negro were open to, and seen by, all the world. The crimes against the Indian are unknown.”***

—Richard Dodge, army officer, 1882

In 1869, Ulysses S. Grant, a military commander in both the Mexican-American War and the Civil War, was elected president. Influenced by those clamoring for reform, he initiated a new policy towards the Indians known as the “Peace Policy.” The goal of this policy was to put all Indian groups on reservations, or lands set aside by the government for Indian use. The idea of reservations was not new. Earlier in the century, U.S. forces had pressed Indian groups in certain regions to live on territories it had set aside for them.

Grant put religious leaders in charge of this policy. On the reservations, religious

groups would teach English, U.S. agricultural practices, and Christianity. But the Peace Policy was not entirely peaceful. The U.S. government would consider all Indians not on the reservations as hostile. U.S. army battalions were dispatched to meet this threat.

Although the Peace Policy did not promote the extermination of Native American people, it did aim to exterminate Indian societies. The ultimate goal was to pacify Native American groups by forcing them to give up their traditions and ways of life and follow the customs of U.S. society.

***“If you can make Quakers out of the Indians it will take the fight out of them. Let us have peace.”***

—President-elect Ulysses S. Grant, 1868

Less than half a century after Lewis and Clark made their trek, the United States had stretched its borders to the Pacific Ocean. U.S. expansion occurred at breakneck pace. But this expansion had come at the expense of the thousands of Native American groups that lived in the territories the United States claimed as its own.

You have just read about the conflict, cooperation, and violence that accompanied European and U.S. colonization of the West. You explored the ideology and policies underpinning U.S. westward expansion, and considered the ways in which this expansion affected people in the West as well as in the East.

In the next reading, you will consider the effects of westward expansion on the groups in one particular region: southern Arizona. This region, ceded to the United States from Mexico in the Gadsden Purchase, was the last territory that the United States would gain in the contiguous United States (the portion of the country that is connected, excluding Hawaii and Alaska). In the decades-long process of U.S. expansion in the West, southern Arizona was the last region to come under U.S. control.