

The Closing of the Western Frontier

The “Indian Problem”

Whose problem was it?

What solutions were available with an open Frontier?

Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831)

Worcester v. Georgia (1832)

(Referred to as the Cherokee Cases)

- ✿ Issue: Georgia had passed laws nullifying Cherokee law & replacing it with Georgia law raising the question of jurisdiction given that the US government had signed various treaties with the Cherokee & other Native American tribes.
- ✿ Decision: In a complicated set of decisions involving multiple jurisdictions and three sets of laws, the Supreme ruled the Cherokee a “domestic dependent” nation rather than a foreign state & that the laws of Georgia had no force within the territorial boundaries of the Cherokee Nation.
- ✿ Domestic Dependent Nations
 - ⊕ Constitution gives national government power to regulate commerce with Native Americans
- ✿ Law more vague on treaties:
 - ⊕ Tribes not defined as “nations;”
 - ⊕ No one wanted to elevate them to that status.
- ✿ Compromise terminology:
 - ⊕ Kept tribes subservient to United States;
 - ⊕ Made interactions with tribes foreign policy.

Indian Removal Act (1830)

- ✿ Five Civilized Nations (Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek & Seminole) targeted;
- ✿ Cherokee targeted not because of their refusal to integrate, but the success of their integration as farmers;
- ✿ Indian Removal Act & Bureau of Indian Affairs believed by many to be only way to “save” Native Americans;
- ✿ Removal was initially voluntary:
 - ⊕ Federal government offered economic & security support;
 - ⊕ If tribes refused, then they lost all federal protection.

- ✿ Led directly to Trail of Tears which turned voluntary removal into forced removal
 - ⊕ Van Buren allowed state militias to imprison tribes in concentration camps;
 - ⊕ US Troops then "escorted" Cherokee to Oklahoma Territory.

How the West Was Closed

Most significant change in American History?

Growth of Nationalism out of the Civil War

- ✿ Republican-controlled Congress passed:
 - ⊕ Morrill Land Grant Act--Land allocated to states as source of revenue for building colleges
 - ⊕ Pacific Railway Act--Promoted building of transcontinental railroad & the telegraph
 - ⊕ Homestead Act--Gave title to 160 acres for anyone who homesteaded on land in the West

Closing of the Frontier

- ✿ From 1865-1890 one of the fastest periods of expansion in nation's history (9 new states)
 - ⊕ Facilitated by Pacific Railway Act & the Homestead Act
 - ⊕ Synergistic effect of the two together
 - ⊕ Two acts also conflicted--Land grants to railroads
- ✿ 1890 Census--Turner Thesis
 - ⊕ Increased population density meant that much of the Frontier nature of the West was gone

The Three Western Frontiers

✿ Mining Frontier

- ⊕ Pikes Peak-Gold in Colorado
- ⊕ Comstock Lode-Gold & Silver in Nevada
- ⊕ Copper Mines in Colorado, Wyoming & Montana
- ✿ The Rush to Ghost Town Cycle
 - ⊕ Most did not profit from mining
 - ⊕ Corporate mining was much more successful & profitable (Guggenheims)

✿ Cattle Frontier

- ⊕ Livestock raised in Texas & Oklahoma
- ⊕ Long Drive to Railroad terminals in Abilene, Ogala & Cheyenne
- ✿ Rise of conflict & corporations
 - ⊕ Long Drive went right through growing Farming Frontier (Barbed Wire)

- ⊕ Real beneficiaries were the meatpacking tycoons (Swift & Armour) in places like Chicago

⊗ **Farming Frontier**

- ⊕ Sooners & Sodbusters--As many as 500,000 families (Only 20,000 before Civil War)
- ⊕ Made possible by three advances--Barbed wire, railroad & Russian wheat
- ⊗ Not to be romanticized
 - ⊕ As many as 2/3 returned to the East or moved from the Plains further west
 - ⊕ Few benefited from Homestead Act--Bought land from land companies or the railroad

Closing of the Frontier?

- ⊗ Not so much about the West filling up.
- ⊗ More about West being crisscrossed.
- ⊗ More about the West becoming corporate
- ⊗ When it comes to the meaning of the Frontier, the impact is the same.

Native Americans & the West

True Impact of the Frontier's Closing

Pressures on the Plains

- ⊗ Pressures of Natural Resources
 - ⊕ Decline on Salmon populations
 - ⊕ Decimation of Buffalo herds
 - ⊕ Over-hunting by Native Americans;
- ⊗ Populating of grasslands & river basins;
- ⊗ Competition from livestock.
 - ⊕ Growing violence especially as wagon trails & railroads increase stream of pioneers into the West
- ⊗ Territorial treaties ceding land & lack of unity among Native Americans

Reservation Complications

- ⊗ Supreme Court defined Native Americans as wards of the federal government:
 - ⊕ Denied citizenship & protections of 14th & 15th Amendments however.
- ⊗ Illogical groupings of Native American Populations:
 - ⊕ Tribes with historical animosities were often grouped on the same reservations.
 - ⊕ Temporary nature of permanent reservations:

- ⊕ Farmers, herders & miners sought reservation land when it eventually proved valuable.

Total War in the West

- ⊗ Military in West dominated by Civil War veterans & leaders, including Sherman, Sheridan & Custer
- ⊗ Tools & Strategies of Total War:
 - ⊕ Destruction of Buffalo;
 - ⊕ Massacres of Native American communities, including women & children;
 - ⊕ In response to such policies, Sheridan was believed to have responded "Nits make lice."

Indian Wars-1862-1890

- ⊗ Dakota War (1862)
 - ⊕ Sioux uprising in response to treaty violations & encroachment on reservation lands.
- ⊗ Sand Creek Massacre (1864)
- ⊗ Red Cloud's War (1866-68)
 - ⊕ Sioux successfully closed the Bozeman Trail to gold fields in Colorado

Indian Wars-1862-1890

- ⊗ Red River War (1874)
 - ⊕ Medicine Lodge Treaty--US Government refused to control buffalo hunters on Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne & Arapahoe land.
- ⊗ Sioux Wars (1876-1890)
 - ⊕ Response to the Battle of Little Big Horn.

Tale of Two Massacres

- ⊗ Sand Creek (Chivington) Massacre (1864)
 - ⊕ Illustrated how much power a commander had in the field had in the West
- ⊗ Wounded Knee Massacre (1890)
 - ⊕ Response to the Ghost Dance "Uprising"
 - ⊕ Last engagement of the Indian wars

Destruction of the American Indian

- ⊗ Treaty-War Cycle
- ⊗ Assimilation
 - ⊕ Friends of the Indian, Carlisle School
 - ⊕ Dawes Severalty Act
- ⊗ The Buffalo Bill Cody Effect
- ⊗ American Indians in Pop Culture